

Leading in extreme futures: Being the driver or a casualty?

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The wide-spread lack of self-awareness and preparedness for self-leadership negatively impacts the health and well-being of billions of people and the viability of our planet. Worldwide we see growing employee disengagement and dissatisfaction with traditional leadership, accentuated by the global economic crisis and dominant global forces of change, demanding a radically different kind of leadership. In this paper the author presents leaders with a macro view of the unprecedented escalating and compounding global and national challenges they are facing. She articulates the distinct advantages for leaders who are leading from their core identity and purpose, and who embrace a mindset aligned with discoveries in modern science and technology-driven trends. The paper addresses five interrelated key areas. Firstly, it explores 'Who and what drives change', focusing on five dominant global forces that are shaping our new world. It then highlights worldwide leadership challenges. In 'Mission critical' the paper makes a strong case for change in the development of leaders based on statistics and drivers of global change that propel us into an unimaginable future and business reality. Next, in proposing a ground-breaking leadership solution, the author draws on her Personal Branding DNA™ work over the past seven years. Lastly, the benefits of this solution are highlighted and guidelines for evaluating a ground-breaking leadership program are offered.

Key words: ground-breaking leadership, personal branding, authenticity, global drivers of change, employee engagement

WHO AND WHAT DRIVES CHANGE?

What we encounter in the world today is way beyond market drivers. The word 'driver' at its core implies change agent. So who and what drives change today? While there may be multiple drivers, the focus in this paper is on five dominant global forces (drivers) that collectively shape our new world.

A growing worldwide dissatisfaction with traditional leadership

All around us there is evidence of a growing dissatisfaction with traditional leadership and its failure to address escalating global issues of corruption, poverty, AIDS, terrorism, violence and climate change. The global connectivity accelerates the communication of this growing dissatisfaction and at the same time we see a new horizon of leadership emerging. The following observation demonstrates this point:

All around the world, people are stepping forward in new ways to provide leadership. In many cases, they are not the people in

positions of power in organizations or communities; they are simply those who see what must be done and are willing to speak, and then act. Often, as they begin to step forward, their hearts are pounding with fear, but they believe the time has come to offer new possibility for the future...Each of these pioneering leaders has stepped into his or her work because of a strong sense of calling, rather than through a methodical, strategic decision-making process. (Stilger, 2008)

Scharmer (2007) speaks of the massive institutional failure, collectively creating results that no one wants; notably the destruction of community, nature and life – our foundation essential for social, economic, ecological and spiritual well-being. He calls for a new consciousness and collective leadership capacity to meet challenges in more conscious, intentional and strategic ways.

Barrett, in 'The New Leadership Agenda', alerts us to the crisis of consciousness and leadership and urges us to act: 'Never before in history has the leadership of human affairs been more critical than it is now. The decisions made in the next two decades will determine the future of humanity.' The crisis experienced across the world goes deeper. It is a spiritual crisis and people are starved

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of purpose and meaning. Their inner lives feel burnt-out and empty. How can we possibly face a radically different world in this deeply compromised state of being?

An escalating dissatisfaction with the state of the world accelerated by the global economic crises

The state of the world referred to here is the failure to address escalating global issues of corruption, poverty, AIDS, terrorism, violence, climate change, as well as the state of the health and well-being of humanity and our planet. The global financial crisis created a confronting transparency of the darkest side of humanity on a grand scale. It accelerated the growing dissatisfaction and stepped up the demands for radically different leadership. Rudd (2009) refers to the global financial crisis as an event of seismic significance that marks a turning point between one era and the next.

In the space of just 18 months, this crisis has become one of the greatest assaults on global economic stability to have occurred in three-quarters of a century. This is a crisis spreading across a broad front: it is a financial crisis which has become a general economic crisis; which is becoming an employment crisis; and which has in many countries produced a social crisis and in turn a political crisis. The global financial crisis has demonstrated already that it is no respecter of persons, nor of particular industries, nor of national boundaries. It is a crisis which is simultaneously individual, national and global.

It requires discipline and mindfulness to keep the spirit and energy high to counteract the fear and negativity that now prevails and is constantly being augmented in and through the media.

A rapidly growing, diverse global movement

Anyone tuned into the worldwide web will be acutely aware of the exponentially increasing number of diverse groups emerging across the globe, working independently of each other to address local, national and global needs and to create a more human world. Hawken (2007) in the video 'Blessed Unrest and Wiser Earth' gives an account of what he calls an unprecedented, diverse, non-ideological, unnamed grassroots movement. 'Like nature itself, it is organising from the bottom up, in every city, town, and culture, and is emerging to be an extraordinary and creative expression of people's needs worldwide. It represents a new world view that has arisen spontaneously as has the shared understanding from different sectors, cultures, religions and cohorts.' There is no precedent for what we are

doing and what we are individually and collectively creating. Yet we know on some level that the possibilities are infinite and that we indeed have the ability to create a world that works for all.

Discoveries in modern science

Discoveries in modern science – quantum physics and new biology – offer us revolutionary insights and possibilities that will transform every aspect of our lives. The implication of quantum physics on our way of thinking is profound. White and Gribben (1994) highlight the key features of quantum physics that can best be understood in terms of what happens when a scientist makes an experiential observation.

First, we have to accept that the very act of observing a thing changes it. We are part of any quantum experiment. Secondly, all we can ever know is the results of experiments. We can look at an electron and find it in position A; then we look again and find it in position B. We guess that it moved from A to B, but we can say nothing at all about how it did so, and what it was doing while we were not looking.

In essence this is telling us that our reality is subjective and by observing or focusing on possibilities we are bringing them into existence. Just stop and think for a moment what this means in terms of developing leaders for the extreme futures. Another profound and intriguing aspect of quantum physics is the interconnectedness of everything in the universe.

Talbot (1991) speaks of Bohm's fully developed ideas of wholeness and the seamless interconnectedness of everything in the universe. Bohm says that everything in the universe is part of a continuum, and dividing reality up into parts and then naming those parts is always arbitrary. He believes it is not only meaningless to view the universe as composed of 'parts' but that 'our almost universal tendency to fragment the world and ignore the dynamic interconnectedness of all things is responsible for many of our problems, not only in science but in our lives and our society as well.'

At first glance, Bohm's assertion of the interconnectedness in the face of apparent separateness may sound contradictory, but is it really? Bohm says that despite the apparent separateness of things at the explicate level, everything is a seamless extension of everything else, and ultimately even the implicate and explicate orders blend into each other. He also cautions that this does not mean the universe is a giant undifferentiated mass.

Things can be part of an undivided whole and still possess their unique qualities. To illustrate what he means he points to the little eddies and whirlpools that often form in a river. At a glance such eddies appear to be separate things and possess many individual characteristics such as size, rate and direction of rotation, etc. But careful scrutiny reveals that it is impossible to determine where any given whirlpool ends and the river begins.

This dynamic interconnectedness, while acknowledging unique qualities, has profound implications for how we live our lives, how we communicate and how we prepare ourselves as leaders for this radically different world that is rapidly emerging.

Lipton's (2005) profound work in cell biology and quantum physics will forever change how we think about our thinking. The science he reveals defines how our beliefs control the behaviour and gene activity, and consequently the unfolding of our lives. These discoveries have profound implications for understanding and treating diseases, and present a radical departure from traditional medicine and its disease-oriented models.

Lipton emphasises that we are spiritual beings who need love as much as we need food. He invites us to work with communities of like-minded people toward advancing human civilisation 'by realizing that Survival of the Most Loving is the only ethic that will ensure not only a healthy personal life but also a healthy planet'.

Technology-driven trends

Canton (2007), a renowned global futurist, urges us to think differently about the future that is characterised by change, challenge and risk. Radical change is coming and he calls this the 'Extreme Future' – a highly dynamic, disruptive and multi-dimensional future. Canton (2009) predicts 'technology driven trends of unknown scope, complexity and global connectivity that will propel us into an as yet unimaginable future and business reality with entire new business models, markets and industries born from an 'always-on' global connectivity.'

In *Extreme Futures*, Canton (2007) presents five factors that will define the extreme futures:

1. **Speed.** The rate of change will be blinding, comprehensive in scope, and will touch every aspect of your life.
2. **Complexity.** A quantum leap in the number of seemingly unrelated forces that will have a direct bearing on everything from lifestyles to work to personal and

national security.

3. Risk. New risks, higher risks and more threats from terror to crime to global economic upheaval will alter every aspect of your life.

4. Change. Drastic adjustments in your work, community, and relationships will force you to adapt quickly to radical changes.

5. Surprise. Sometimes good, sometimes difficult to imagine, surprise will become a daily feature of your life, often challenging sensibility and logic.

The integrated force of these factors will shake our core foundation. Collectively these global drivers of change are fierce, complex and multi-dimensional. They represent what Lewis (2009) calls 'The revolution within evolution', a rapid expansion of our consciousness. We could also say these drivers represent interrelated outward manifestation of the shift in consciousness rapidly taking place across the globe. Either way, we are confronted with a rapidly approaching yet unknown level playing field, marked by diversity, complexity and risk.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Today's leaders walk a fine line between becoming a strong force in shaping the rapidly emerging new world or becoming a casualty of massive breakdowns of what Barrett in 'The New Leadership Agenda' calls 'an unsustainable economic paradigm that threatens the global sustainability of our human society'.

Leaders are faced with the impact of the global drivers of change on a grand scale, as well as with challenges of a worldwide increase in employee disengagement, rising depression and escalating stress in an uncertain and rapidly changing world. Individually and together these amount to gigantic emotional, mental, physical and economic costs and lost opportunities for individuals, leaders, organisations, communities and nations. Yet, many leaders may not be aware of these challenges or may be unaware of the global nature, scale and impact of these challenges.

Employee engagement

Engagement refers to the extent people enjoy and believe in what they are doing and feel valued for it. Gallup depicts employee engagement as the lifeline of business and a leading indicator of financial and business performance.

Bryant and Killham (2007) describe three types of

employees: engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged. Engaged employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward. Employees who are not engaged are essentially 'checked out'. They are putting time but not energy or passion into their work. Actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work. Every day they undermine what their engaged co-workers seek to accomplish.

Multiple studies in different countries and across industries show that employees who are passionate about their jobs and the organisations in which they work are in the minority, says Development Dimensions International (DDI) in 'Employee Engagement: The Key to Realizing Competitive Advantage'. Its own research reveals that only 19 percent of employees are highly engaged.

Employee disengagement

Employee disengagement is a growing worldwide trend in developed countries according to several global studies¹, with Australia showing a disengagement of 62%, UK 70% and US 57%. The Gallup Survey (2008) showed the highest employee disengagement in Germany (67%), followed by the US (51%), France (31%) and Japan (23%), with the lowest levels being for Switzerland and India (both at 8%).

In Australia, the cost of employee disengagement in 2007 with 61% employees disengaged and 18% actively disengaged, was estimated by Gallup (2007) at \$AU32.7 billion.

DDI cites some staggering Gallup (2003) cost estimates of low employee and leader engagement in the United Kingdom and in Japan. Disengaged workers in the United Kingdom cost their companies \$US64.8 billion a year. In Japan, where only 9% of the workforce is engaged, lost productivity is estimated to be \$US232 billion each year. In a study of America's leading companies, DDI² also found a 1000% increase in errors amongst disengaged employees as compared with their engaged counterparts.

Leaders' lack of awareness of their strengths and glaring weaknesses plays a significant role in employee disengagement. Rath and Conchi (2008), based on an analysis of Gallup's 2007 global client

¹ Country HR Consultancy Right Management. Viewed June 2008

www.rightmanagment.com.au/news; Gallup Engagement Survey Oct-Nov 2009. Web link no longer available.

² Development Dimensions International, Oct 2006. Web link no longer available.

database, show that the vast majority of people **do not** have 'the opportunity to do what they do best every day'. This problem, the authors claim, 'runs rampant in workplaces throughout the world'. The opportunity for employees to use their strengths at work is reported to be highest in India (36%), followed by the USA (32%), Canada (30%) and Germany (26%), with countries on the lower end being UK (17%), Japan (15%), China (14%) and France (13%).

These findings are not surprising given the revelation that most leaders lack awareness of their own strengths and glaring weaknesses. How can leaders who are unaware of their own strengths recognise, cultivate and engage them in others? This lack of self-awareness, according to Rath and Conchi (2008), at its worst can lead to masses of disengaged employees, unhappy customers, and undue stress beyond the workplace.

Amazingly, Gallup (2007) studies³ over the past 30 years have repeatedly shown huge gaps between organisations' leadership that focuses on strengths and those that don't in terms of people engagement at work. The potential for engagement where leadership focuses on strengths is 73% versus 9% where there is no such focus – resulting in a productivity loss and opportunity cost of 64%. When leaders focus on and invest in their employees' strengths, the odds of each person being engaged goes up eightfold.

Depression: The silenced voice

The rapid rise in depression worldwide presents another major concern for leaders. Some critics question whether depression is on the rise or whether the escalating depression statistics are simply a reflection of increased recognition and reporting. Either way, the depression statistics are of serious concern and reflect the emotional, mental, physical and financial health of our nations that have far-reaching implications beyond employers and traditional leadership. Of even greater concern is the World Health Organization's⁴

³ Gallup's 2007 global database analysis cited in 'New Gallup Book Destroys the Myth of the Well-Rounded Leader.' Gallup scientists surveyed more than one million work teams, conducted more than 20,000 in-depth interviews with leaders, and even interviewed more than 10,000 followers around the world to ask exactly *why* they followed the most important leader in their life.

⁴ Depression Statistics, viewed Sunday 27 December 2009 from www.upliftprogram.com/depression_stats.html#statistics

assertion that 'depression is presently on track to becoming the world's second-most disabling disease (after heart disease) by the year 2020.' Depression is responsible for some \$87 billion a year in lost productivity in the US (a conservative estimate), and according to Bank One, is responsible for most lost work days in its employees after pregnancy and childbirth.¹

Depressive disorders affect approximately 18.8 million American adults or about 9.5% of the US population aged 18 years and older in a given year². In Australia, according to Young (2009) nearly three million people experience depression or anxiety each year, and many of them are in their prime working years. Depression and anxiety are the second leading cause of disability and mortality in Australia. Depression will touch everyone – including employers – either directly or indirectly in today's world.

According to the Depression Statistics (Learning How) 'Depression currently costs employers approximately \$51 billion a year in medical expenses and loss of productivity due to absenteeism...The scariest depression statistics are the ones that deal with children...there are currently 23% more children being diagnosed with depression than in previous years. The largest rise in juvenile depression can be found in preschoolers.'

Work-related stress realities

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) over 7 years (2001-2008) consistently showed that 35% of the population operates at moderate to very high level of psychological distress. Cryer cites 'high levels of emotional distress being among the most costly health problems in terms of health care utilisation, absenteeism, progression of chronic disease and failure to meet productivity standards'.

Better Health Channel State of Victoria (2007) estimates the total cost of workers compensation claims for stress-related conditions to be greater than \$200 million/year. Work-related stress accounts for an increase in sick days, the longest stretches of absenteeism, higher staff turnover and a drop in productivity. Possible consequences of work-related stress include increased susceptibility

to workplace accidents, deterioration of personal relationships, workplace aggression, violence and ill health.

Stress Statistics (Zen at Work) show an increase of stress-related workers compensation claims of 400% in the last 10 years. The payout costs have doubled in the last six years. Average claim costs in NSW in 2000 were over \$23,000 each. The average NSW claimant takes over 20 weeks off work per year. The total cost of Australian workplace stress³, is now estimated to be \$1.2 billion per year. Stress at work is listed by the World Health Organization⁴ as one of the top ten key determinants of poor health, and the OHS community is urged to take action. Whilst the work-related stress statistics presented lack uniformity and are scattered across years and states, and report on diverse aspects, they paint a dismal picture of the lack of health and well-being of individuals, communities, organisations and our nation.

MISSION CRITICAL

Finding new solutions to deal with escalating costs and a downward spiral of the physical, mental, and emotional health of our nation at a time of global economic crisis and complex disruptive change, is mission-critical. The widespread employee disengagement, depression and work-related stress severely undermine individual, organisational and national capabilities to prepare for, and navigate and lead revolutionary change in complex, diverse and radical different environments. As Albert Einstein said, 'We cannot solve the problems with the same way of thinking that created them'.

This unprecedented reality calls for a fundamental and immediate change in the way we think about leadership and how we develop leaders, drawing on discoveries of modern science and our own intuitive inner knowing. It requires an openness and readiness to explore our inner dimension – who we really are, our true purpose for being here and our unique gifts to make our contribution to the world. Barrett (1998) in *Liberating the Corporate Soul* refers to evolution as a continual state of transformation and change, where transformation is about our being and change is about our doing. Traditional leadership development has predominantly focused on doing – on skill and competency development – grossly ignoring the purpose of leadership that emanates from the

¹ Depression Forum, Depression Statistics. Viewed 27 Dec 2009 www.depressionforums.org web link no longer available.

² Depression Statistics, viewed Sunday 27 December 2009 from www.upliftprogram.com/depression_stats.html#statistics.

³ ACTU Bill Mansfield May 2000

⁴ WHO: The Solid Facts, Professor Michael Marmot 2000 ref ACTU

depth of our being. Scharmer (2007) underscores the essence when he says 'We are blind to the source dimension from which effective leadership and social action come into being'.

GROUND-BREAKING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: A PROPOSED SOLUTION

Ground-breaking leadership development is a name given by the author to a radically different form of leadership development. It prepares leaders from all walks of life to connect with their innate leader, core identity, true purpose and unique gifts and to develop their leadership from that core to confidently navigate and lead in extreme futures. In describing the benefits and what to look for in such a program, the author draws on her seven-year experience in soul-inspired leadership development, using a process known as Personal Branding DNA™. This process transformed her life in 2003. It led to the launching of her legacy work – World Leadership Day (www.worldleadershipday.org), a global grassroots leadership initiative that within three years has grown to a team of 20 World Leadership Ambassadors, representing 18 countries around the globe.

Today, personal branding has become a hot trend around the globe. Unfortunately, most of what is offered by others leads to trapping clients into a brand image that more than likely will leave them feeling frustrated and unfulfilled. Yet inside every person is a powerful voice that is their unique trademark. It is a personal brand that leads individuals to standing out authentically while claiming their significance in the world.

Personal Branding DNA™ is an exclusive, in-depth 1:1 coaching and facilitation program for leaders who want to develop their distinct authentic personal brand and lead from their core identity and purpose. It is conducted via weekly telephone meetings over three to six months. Pioneered by US personal branding strategist Genece Hamby in early 2001, PB DNA™ is a powerful and original methodology that allows individuals to identify and articulate their unique and authentic value in the world. It is the only program of its kind that architects a person's personal brand from the ground up based on their authenticity – that helps them find their true voice. It is unique because it approaches the challenge of being notable and distinct from an entirely different starting place. It starts with the person and what is at their core.

Personal Branding DNA™ takes you to the essence

of who you are. You discover what is genuinely unique about you, who you are meant to become through your life purpose and who you are meant to serve through your authentic voice. Your personal brand is identified through a dynamic strategic DNA¹ process called F.A.C.E., which stands for Focus, Align, Connect and Excel. Each phase builds on the previous:

- **The Focus Phase** helps you answer three critical personal brand questions: What makes you distinctive? What makes you notable? What makes you authentic?
- **The Align Phase** is the part of the process where you align your professional life with your personal life so there is no separation between the two. It aligns your personal brand identity with your personal brand image so you are deeply congruent and in-synch with the most powerful part of who you are and why you are here.
- **The Connect Phase** helps you understand how you communicate and how you articulate your message to the world in a meaningful and authentic way.
- **The Excel Phase** helps you excel in your personal brand development through building consistency and constancy into your personal brand every day.

Leaders who lead from their core identity and purpose are grounded in who they are and in their contribution to the world. They model authentic leadership, embrace diversity, and create purpose and meaning in their work environments. They operate from a place of quiet confidence that enables them to access their inner resources and wisdom, make sound decisions and tune into synchronicities and intuitive guidance.

BENEFITS OF A GROUND-BREAKING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A ground-breaking leadership development program overcomes all of the challenges identified in this paper and provides leaders with rich benefits, including:

- expand leaders' thinking of what is possible towards playing a bigger game
- develop trust in intuitive decision-making in an environment of uncertainty and

¹ DNA stands for Distinct, Notable, Authentic.

rapid, complex and multidimensional change

- inspire authentic leadership in others through congruently and effortlessly walking the talk
- unleash the innate creativity and innovation in self and others
- attract and cultivate vibrant and engaged employees who express their unique leadership through their work
- enjoy health and wellbeing of self and employees as a natural by-product of authentic leading and living
- access to an infinite inner source of energy and wisdom.

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING A GROUND-BREAKING LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Congruency: Listen for congruency in language in the written and verbal communication. Is what is being offered ground-breaking and congruent? Or is it an attractive repackaged program of traditional leadership development, without exploring the inner dimensions of leadership?

Core identity: Explore what core identity in the context of leadership means and why it is important. Our core identity is the essence of who we are and it connects us with an infinite source of energy. It's the drive behind living our true purpose.

Mindset: Explore what mindset the leadership program fosters and cultivates. A mindset aligned with the discoveries in modern science is essential to excel in an environment of complexity, risk and radical change.

Health and wellbeing: Explore how the health and wellbeing of a person will be impacted by the

leadership program. When connecting with the core identity there is an inspirational energy that naturally creates a vibrant sense of health and well-being.

Navigate the new business landscape: Explore how the program prepares leaders in navigating the new business landscape with ease and confidence. When we connect with our core identity we have a clear world view and our navigation is guided by our intuition and synchronicities.

Manage complexity: Explore how the program prepares leaders to manage high complexity in an environment of uncertainty and rapid change. It's the clarity, focus and direction of our worldview, and our role in it, that allows us to see through and navigate complexity with ease – because we are grounded in our authentic contribution and guided by our inner compass.

CONCLUSION

Today's leaders walk a fine line between becoming a strong force in shaping the rapidly emerging new world or becoming a casualty of massive breakdown that threatens the global sustainability of our human society. The widespread employee disengagement, depression and work-related stress severely undermine individual, organisational and national capabilities to prepare for, and navigate and lead revolutionary change in complex, diverse and radically different environments. We cannot solve these issues with the same kind of thinking and leadership with which we created them. This unprecedented reality calls for a fundamental and immediate change in the way we think about leadership and how we develop leaders, drawing on discoveries of modern science and our own intuitive knowing. It requires openness and readiness to a radically different form of leadership development that connects leaders with their core identity, true purpose and unique gifts to navigate and lead in extreme futures with confidence and ease.



Elisabeth Gortschacher is an entrepreneurial leader of transformational change. Her company, EEG Coaching, established in 1998 as a centre of excellence to serve humanity, has undergone vast transformation over the years in line with her own personal and professional evolution. Her clients are visionary, emerging leaders and entrepreneurs who want their life and business to be the expression of their soul's purpose, and who are willing to live beyond the edge. Elisabeth's work is anchored in the unquestionable knowing that every person is an authentic leader when their actions, words and choices are aligned with their soul's purpose. Elisabeth founded World Leadership Day (www.worldleadershipday.org), stepping up the expression of her soul's purpose and turning her passion for authentic leadership development into a global initiative positively impacting the health and wellbeing of humanity through authentic living and leading. Elisabeth's qualifications include MCC, MBA, BEd (Nursing), Certifications in Personal Branding DNA™, Neurological Repatterning, NicheCraft and Guerrilla Marketing. She can be reached by email at elisabeth@eeg-coaching.com.au.

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