

Developing the consciousness of leaders

An interview with Richard Barrett

Richard Barrett is the founder and chairman of the Barrett Values Centre and the author of several books on values-based leadership and organisational culture. His latest book is *The New Leadership Paradigm*. The book also integrates with an online learning system that is available (www.newleadershipparadigm.com) He visited Sydney in 2011 and Glenn Martin interviewed him.

THE WORD “SPIRITUALITY”

Glenn: There is an ongoing debate about what language is appropriate to use when seeking to engage the interest of business leaders in consciousness. What are your thoughts about spirituality in the workplace?

Richard: In the business world, the word “spirituality” often meets with resistance. For many managers, it denotes something that doesn’t have much to do with business, even though it refers to qualities that are very supportive of good business practices. My experience has been that the word “consciousness” is much more palatable. My second book was titled *Liberating the Corporate Soul* and even though I use the word *soul*, this book has been translated into many languages and continues to sell very well.

If you want to get business leaders interested in consciousness, you need to talk their language and address their daily concerns. The seven levels of consciousness model does just that—it presents a way of looking at business that people not only recognise but feel is appropriate to their concerns. In reality, the seven levels of consciousness model encompasses the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

THE MODEL OF SEVEN LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Glenn: Your model is based on the idea that people display different sets of values, and these can be characterised in seven developmental levels or existential life conditions. What is it about this idea that attracts people in organisations and business?

Richard: The model is very simple to understand; it is couched in business terminology, and it helps people see where their business is from an evolutionary perspective and what they need to do to improve their performance.

The tools that go with the model (Cultural Transformation Tools) compare the values that people have in their personal lives with the values they see in their organisation, and the values that they would like to see in their organisation. This is valuable objective data that business leaders ignore at their own peril. The data shows what is working, what is not working and the degree of dysfunction in the organisation.

IDENTIFYING A HELPFUL SET OF VALUES

Glenn: How do you handle the fact that when you talk about values, people think of an extraordinary range of qualities, from ethics to competency to lifestyle?

Richard: We have been mapping values for more than 14 years now and we have over 3,000 words and phrases in our data base that we can call upon to populate the templates we use in our surveys. We create a customised template of values for every organisation. The list of values includes positive as well as potentially limiting values such as blame, internal competition, ruthlessness, etc. These values create dysfunction in the organisation. The proportion of these types of values compared to positive values is called cultural entropy. We have found that organisations with levels of entropy above 45% tend not to survive because so much energy is going into unproductive activities.

There is a straight line inverse correlation between employee engagement and cultural entropy. High entropy leads to low engagement, and vice versa. There is also a strong relationship between the predominance of positive values and the organisation’s income growth.

VALUES ACROSS CULTURES

Glenn: Does this model of values apply across cultures?

Richard: Since the template of values we use is customised for every organisation, differences in culture are automatically taken care of by the choice of words or phrases that respondents can pick from. When we carry out surveys for multinational organisations, we customise the template so that it can apply to the different countries in which the organisation operates.

We have carried out over 3,500 surveys in more than 40 different countries and in over 30 different languages.

Glenn: Does the concept of cultural entropy apply to countries too?

Richard: Yes. We have been mapping the values in nations for several years now. When we mapped the values of Iceland in August 2008, we found a level of cultural entropy of around 54%. When I visited the country in early September, I stated in my public meetings that if Iceland was an organisation it would be going bankrupt about now. Two weeks later that is what happened. Cultural entropy is a very powerful measure of the well being of a nation.

IDENTITY

Glenn: So the concept of identity is part of your model?

Richard: Yes. In my latest book *The New Leadership Paradigm*, I show how the model represents seven levels of identity. It also reflects seven levels of happiness.

I also show how the seven levels of consciousness align with the three universal stages of evolution. These principles apply to atoms, cells and human beings:

- An entity has first to become viable and independent in its framework of existence or it will cease to exist.
- When conditions become more complex and an entity's survival is threatened it bonds with other viable independent entities to form a group structure.
- As conditions become even more complex and difficult, group structures cooperate with each other to form a higher order entity.

I have used this framework together with the seven levels of consciousness model to create a leadership development program that anyone on the planet can use for themselves or to work with their clients (www.newleadershipparadigm.com). There are workbooks and journals that can be downloaded for leading yourself, leading a team, leading an organisation and leading in society. They are currently available in English and Spanish.

THE DESIRE TO DEVELOP CONSCIOUSNESS

Glenn: What is it that makes a person want to grow and develop their consciousness?

Richard: Most people begin the process of personal development when they face a life-challenging situation or when they realise that there must be more to life than consumerism and self-esteem—having a big car, a fancy house and a level of status in society that makes them feel good.

We can help people see these possibilities by doing an Individual Values Assessment, where they look at their personal values, the values they experience in their organisation and the values they would like to see. When we show people their profile, they “get it” immediately. We can also do a feedback assessment where people pick out the values that they see you operating with, and we compare these to the values that you believe you operate with. This forms the basis of a two-hour coaching session.

Both these approaches yield significant insights that can get people started or help them progress on a development path which leads to the evolution of their consciousness.

There is a great book on this: *Firms of Endearment* (Sisodia, Wolfe & Seth). The authors examined firms that have regard to the good of others as well as their own interests. They compared these firms with the average of the S&P 500 and the companies Jim Collins identified in *Good to Great*. The “firms of endearment” outperformed all others because they recognise and care about everyone, not just self. They are operating from full-spectrum consciousness.

To operate like this, leaders first have to get past their own ego needs. There is a stage of transformation

where people see that their best interests are not served through selfishness, but by having regard for the common good. Our best interests are ultimately served by caring for others, by transcending the fears of the ego.

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON LEADERSHIP?

Glenn: There are thousands of books on leadership. What called you to write *The New Leadership Paradigm*?

Richard: This was not a book I initially wanted to write. There are over 300,000 books on Amazon on leadership. I thought to myself “What more could be said?” But then I realised that when people write a book on leadership, they generally write it from the level of consciousness at which they operate. So the book only tells you about how that person operates. It is highly subjective. For example, Donald Trump has a chapter on revenge in his book. I couldn’t find anyone writing from the seven levels perspective, so that is what I decided to do.

LIVING AT THE SEVENTH LEVEL

Glenn: If a person encounters the model and sees its validity, then why don’t they immediately try to start living at the seventh level?

Richard: This is not desirable because we need to work effectively at all the levels. Some people can be very strong on the values of the higher levels, but not very good at fulfilling their needs at the basic levels. For example, they have high social ideals, but they can’t figure out how to make the money they need to survive. Or they are not good at processes and organising their lives. You have to be full-spectrum to lead a fulfilling life. And, organisations need to be full-spectrum if they are to achieve high performance.

We need to master all the levels. It’s not that “higher is better”. When organisations and teams map their values, they can see what levels they need to develop. Being “spiritual” does not necessarily pay the bills. There needs to be balance.

THE CONCEPT OF WISDOM

Glenn: The concept of wisdom in management and in business has entered into public discussion recently. What would you say about wisdom?

Richard: I would say this: nobody owns wisdom. It comes through you. As soon as you say you own it, you’ve lost it. Wisdom comes from not knowing. Everything you think you know blocks you from having new ideas. The more you evolve through the levels of consciousness, the more you can open yourself up to the wisdom of your soul, and the collective unconscious. For me, you reach your ultimate level of performance when you become the servant to your soul. Your soul manifests in a physical body for two reasons: to give your gift (whatever you are passionate about) and to remove fear. As you do the latter, you find that you are more able to do the former.

FURTHER READING

Richard Barrett, 2010. *The New Leadership Paradigm*, Barrett Values Centre.

Richard Barrett, 1998. *Liberating the Corporate Soul*, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Richard Barrett, 2008. “What’s right and wrong with spirituality in the workplace”, Barrett Values Centre.

Rajendra Sisodia, David Wolfe and Jagdish Seth, 2007. *Firms of Endearment*, Wharton School of Publishing.

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