

## **Six Principles for 21st Century Leaders**

Vol 2 Issue 1- Jan 2006

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In my 15+ years of work with organizations and senior executives, I have found six principles, derived from spiritual literature, to be quite helpful in coaching executives to become successful in these times of great change. These six principles are interdependent and describe a cycle that when followed can help you develop new competencies and achieve higher levels of success. The essence of these principles is self-knowledge. The more you practice the principles, the better you begin to know yourself.

### **Clarity of Intention**

Intention is critical to achieving success. You may have an idea of the results you want and the direction you're heading when you take on a project, but most often you lack clarity about your goal, let alone knowledge of how to measure success if you achieve it.

When the intention is not clear, attention drifts and leads to confusion. In such circumstances, you often end up compromising your own efforts and receive less than what you desire or even deserve. Without a crystal clear intention, you rarely experience a sense of accomplishment even if your more general intentions are fulfilled.

To increase your clarity of intention, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is it that I really want?
- What evokes passion and joy in my heart?
- How passionately do I feel about it?
- What am I willing to give up (sacrifice) to achieve the desired goal?
- If I have more than one intention, which one should I first attempt?

These questions bring to the surface some of your assumptions and passion, helping you to prioritize your intentions (and hence your actions). Finally, exploring your intention creates a pathway to discovering your unique purpose in life. When you are aligned with what you want at head, heart and gut level, chances are your actions are also aligned, and you increase the likelihood of achieving the results you're seeking. Constant practice helps you to stay focused on what you want until you get it.

### **Awareness**

Awareness is of two kinds: self-awareness and the awareness of the world around you. When you develop self-awareness – of both your competencies and weaknesses, you gain a better understanding of who you are and what you want, and equally important a clear picture of who you're not and what you don't want. Developing a deeper awareness of where others are coming from and remembering that you're also a player in creating the situation, you may be able to relax and become interested in others and their point of view.

Awareness is dynamic. It is about continually being vigilant against complacency. You need to continually and dynamically reassess where you are with respect to where you were and where you want to go.

There are four mental processes that act as enemies to awareness.

#### *Personal Expectations and Standards*

Everyone has their own set of standards and internal expectations. You pick them up from people whom you respect and like the most. Whatever their standards are, you attempt to live up to them even though your competencies and passion might not allow you to reach those expectations and meet those standards you unconsciously picked up. Only by becoming aware of those standards can you do something about them.

#### *False / Incorrect Knowledge*

You sometimes assume things about yourself and others that are plainly not true. Because you didn't face any challenges when you first assumed them, you sometimes take it for granted that they must be true. And if you get some proof that you might be right in one extreme condition, you may think that your assumptions are universally true. This is the source of your misidentified and incorrect knowledge. Once you have such knowledge, you rarely verify that in the real world and it becomes a block to awareness.

#### *Wild Imagination (and attachment to it)*

There is time for dreaming and fantasizing, and there is time for focusing and getting things done. Unfortunately, imagination can at times be so seductive that you're unwilling to accept that it is fantasy – not reality – and then it becomes a block to awareness.

#### *Memory of Past Successes and Failures*

Faulty memory can also trap you into believing that your memory is right and the new data is wrong. And

often past successes are bigger blocks to awareness than past failures. Of course, failure is a stepping stone to success if you can learn from it, but it is not commonly done.

Developing and practicing awareness requires becoming mindful of your own thoughts, feelings and body sensations. They give you early warning signals if you pay attention. You can become aware of your own thought processes by using reflective or contemplative practices, writing a journal regularly and continual examination of your intentions. Most awareness is tacit, but you can learn to pay better attention to your body signals, pains and pleasures, and energy shifts. They tell you to slow down your actions and reflect on the meaning of those body signals. The more aware you are of yourself, the sharper your senses become in observing your surroundings.

### **Empathy**

While clarity of intention and awareness set you onto the path to success, empathy and compassion helps you to gain the support of others.

Empathy is the foundation for emotional intelligence. By being kind and empathetic, you allow yourself to build lasting relationships with your colleagues, employees and customers. When the situation has conflicts and divisiveness, the attitudes of warmth and affection can diffuse the tension. At that point, it is possible to become open to the idea of further exploration for an amicable solution.

The practice of empathy requires demonstrating openness, mutual respect and trust in your relationships. Deep listening—not just to the words but the meaning behind the words—is the foundation for an empathetic relationship. Sharing from the heart and feeling the pain of others nurtures relationships. Empathy begets more empathy and is the source of a creative partnership.

### **Appreciation**

While empathy opens the door, appreciation welcomes you in. By appreciating and acknowledging others, you increase their state of happiness. They, in turn, reciprocate and contribute happiness back to you and others they touch. Appreciation is also about self-acceptance, as you can only appreciate others to the extent that you can appreciate yourself. Self-acceptance accelerates the process of self-development. Unfortunately, most people rarely appreciate who they are and what they receive.

Appreciation is not flattery, but rather a genuine acknowledgment of a person's contribution. Honest appreciation lets others know that you honor and respect who they are. It also boosts morale and amplifies what gave rise to that appreciation in the first place.

Make it a ritual every day to find something positive that you have done or some contribution that you have made to others. Even if the work you have done has not yet produced the desired result, appreciate the steps you have taken so far. Similarly, appreciate what others do in their struggle to achieve the results they want. Be authentic when you give such feedback. Then you and the other person can discuss how to improve the efforts and get the desired results later on.

### **Stretching Beyond Your Own Limits**

Your free will to take actions that stretch you beyond your comfort zone gives you the ability to change the course you're on. To do this, your intentions must be clear, active and flexible. In this stretch mode, you become immensely creative and passionate. Without such passion, you wouldn't even attempt to stretch in the first place.

Yes, stretching beyond your own perceived limits requires risk-taking, and people are naturally uncomfortable about taking risks and facing the possibility of failing. So-called 'failures' often create mental blocks and boundaries, most of which are self-imposed. By learning to stretch beyond your comfort zone, you begin to break through these mental barriers and discover your untapped potential. When you know that you're appreciated and not judged, you have an easier time to stretch beyond your limits.

To practice the principle of stretching the limits, find opportunities to learn and be vulnerable. Vulnerability does not mean being weak. It is about being in the state of not knowing and hence being open to learning. Your ability to learn is directly proportional to your ability to be vulnerable.

The key is to be willing to fail and then ask questions instead of making assumptions. Practice telling the truth when you're not sure of what the implications may be. Doing this serves to create an environment of nurturing and caring in which other people can also let their guard down and discover themselves to be bigger than they ever imagined.

### **Letting Go of What Doesn't Work**

While the first five principles can get you to the edge of success, success eludes those who do not know when to let go and move on. By learning to let go of your old mindsets, you begin to discover new possibilities and new approaches. Letting go doesn't mean giving up; it means not worrying about the result while continuing to perform the action. That posture gives you the freedom to act in a relaxed yet focused manner and frees you to be more natural in order to bring out the best in yourself.

Letting go is also about flexibility and good judgment. When you know what to let go of and when to do so, you can take responsibility for what you can hold onto and for how long you must do so.

### **The Cycle of the Six Principles**

Intention provides the direction and focus for your actions. Awareness gives you the capacity and intelligence to go after your goal. Empathy helps you to build partnerships with others, and appreciation is the key to motivation and productivity. Stretching beyond your perceived limits helps you to grow and meet challenges, and letting go of your attachments assures not only success but also accomplishment. And when you succeed in what you have undertaken, it is time to go back and clarify your intentions all over again as you set new goals. By practicing these six principles with self-awareness you can achieve not only success, but also self-discovery.

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