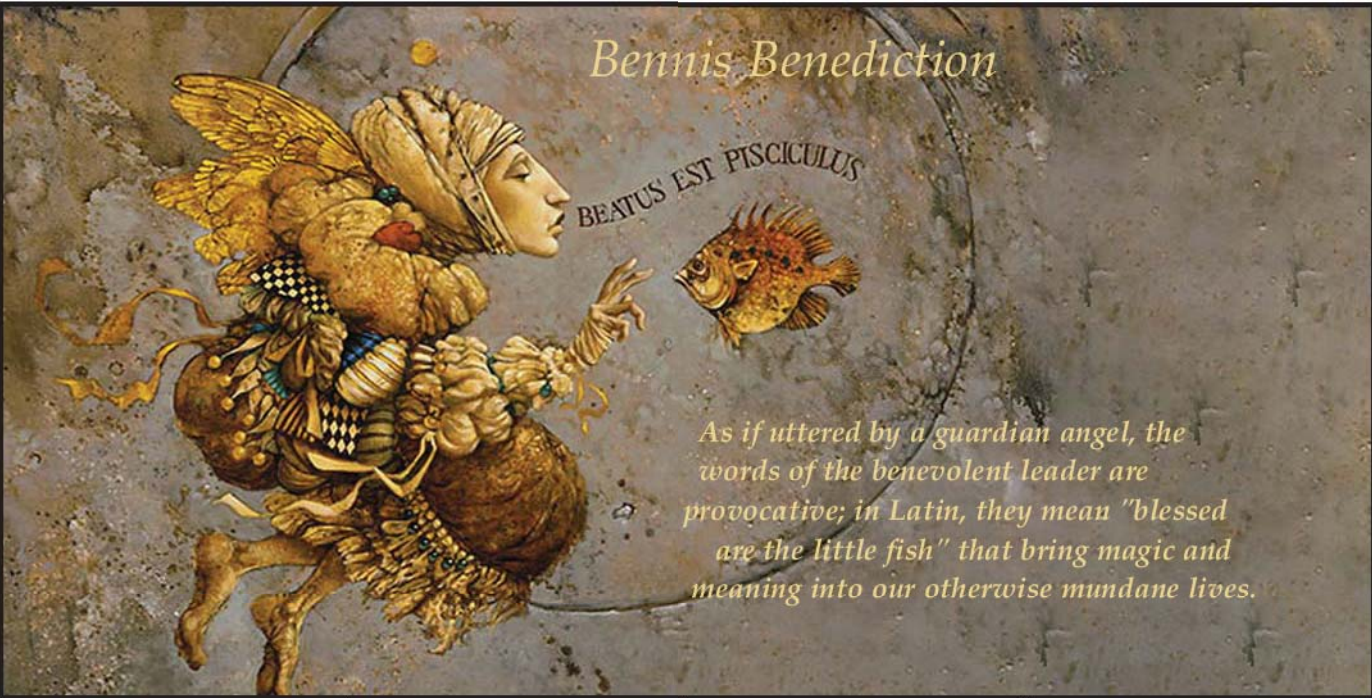


LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



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Bennis Benediction

BEATUS EST PISCICULUS

As if uttered by a guardian angel, the words of the benevolent leader are provocative; in Latin, they mean "blessed are the little fish" that bring magic and meaning into our otherwise mundane lives.

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Leading in Crisis

Lead from the inside out.



by Kevin Cashman

AT THE CORE OF LEADERSHIP is the distinction we make between managers and leaders. *Managers improve what is; managers enhance what is; managers move forward what is; leaders go beyond what is.* How do we go beyond what is and genuinely transform ourselves and our organizations to lead in extraordinary times?

During economic uncertainty, turbulence and dramatic change, many leaders tend to stand still, to hesitate when facing unfamiliar territory. Many feel overwhelmed, and can't see a way out. Others step back, gather information, and get bearings, knowing that the opportunity of leadership lies in stepping into change. Managers ask, "How can we control costs and resources to manage change?" Leaders ask, "How can we accelerate change? Leading in crisis calls upon all the principle, tools and practices of *Leadership from the Inside Out*.

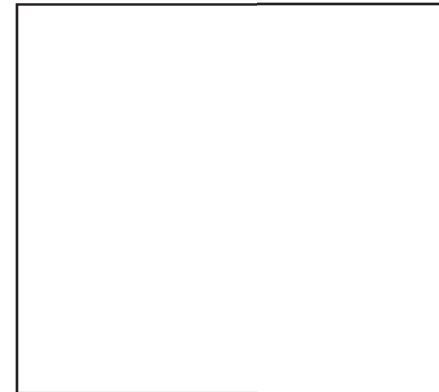
I explore how great leaders evoke all the key forces available within and outside them to create innovative, sustainable results. The *experience of leadership* is like standing on the edge of a deep abyss—and the *act of leadership* is building a bridge across that chasm. What is the bridge from the known area of management to the unknown area of leadership? How do we build it? How do we as leaders, teams and organizations *transcend what is*, to grow to the next level of effectiveness during challenging and crucial times? I address this challenge by exploring *eight leadership principles*: Character, Purpose, Connection, Ethics, Agility, Resilience, Coaching, and Presence. *Character is the theme of this article.*

Character Principle

A soldier in pre-revolutionary Russia confronts a priest and commands, "Who are you? Where are you going and why?" Unfazed, the priest replies, "How much do they pay you?" When the soldier answers, "25 kopecks a month," the priest says, "I'll pay you 50 if you stop me every day and challenge me to respond to those three questions."

Do you have a *soldier* confronting you with tough questions? If Enron, Madoff, and many Wall Street leaders had to answer those questions daily, *would they have made different choices?* If, *character is our fate*, as Heraclitus wrote, do we step back often enough to question and to affirm ourselves in order to reveal our character? As leaders, do we rise above circumstances and do what our leadership mentor, *Warren Bennis* advises: "Remind people what is important." No easy task when the world around us is crumbling.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins writes, "Level 5 leaders channel their ego away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they're incredibly ambitious, but their ambition is first and foremost for the contribution, not for themselves." Leading with character allows us to transcend our egos and move into authentic service and contribution. Collins says Level 5 leaders—*authentic leaders*—lead with character, see beyond their limited selves



seeing their leadership role as a passionate instrument of service and contribution, and understand that if our lives do not stand for something bigger than ourselves, our leadership lacks purpose and sustained contribution.

If leadership is authentic influence that creates value, how do we influence more authentically? Authenticity does not have "10 easy steps." It requires a life-long commitment to self-discovery and self-observation. However, in coaching leaders to develop authentic dimensions of self, I've found some helpful practices to bring out the essence of who we are. When a leader approaches the question, "How authentic am I?" it's often helpful to ask some other questions first: "Where is my leadership coming from? Where are my beliefs and values coming from?" We need to consider the origin of our leadership in various circumstances. Is our leadership serving only ourselves, our

career and success, or is it also focused on others? Is our leadership arising from our *Character*, our higher self, that seeks to serve others? Or, is it derived from a pattern of *Coping*, where we tend to react to circumstances to elicit an immediate, self-preserving result?

Character works to transform and open up possibilities and potential. When you lead from character, you exude qualities of authenticity, service, purpose, openness, trust, courage, congruence, and compassion. You have the ability to transform circumstances, open up possibilities, and create lasting value.

Coping protects us and helps us get through challenging circumstances. In this sense, it has value, and if used appropriately, will serve our needs. Qualities of *Coping* include concern for image, safety, security, comfort, or control. The *Coping* leader may get results but also exhibit defensiveness, fear, withdrawal, a desire to win at all costs, or exclusion of people or information.

Both approaches to leadership—leading with *Character* and leading by *Coping*—can get results. *Coping* may be needed in certain situations. For leadership, however, *Character* is a much better master, and *Coping* is a much better servant. For example, image may be a component of leadership, which can create influence and value when it is aligned with messages delivered from the leader's deeper values. On the other hand, image may be used to manipulate messages in an attempt to compensate for a leader's insecurity, and this may lead to devastating results. When we make *Character* the master of our leadership and *Coping* the servant, we move toward better relationships and lasting value creation.

If people don't develop personally and evolve their leadership style, they do not advance in their careers. One of our clients, Tracy, had a take-charge, task-focused style, which worked well up to a point. She could easily have got stuck in her career, falling short of potential. Before Tracy could move to the next stage of her leadership, she needed to access a platform of internal competence and character. She came to realize that *her excessive need to control* was based on a belief that just being herself and trusting that things would work out was not an option for her. At a crucial point in our coaching, she said, "If I stopped controlling everything, my life would fall apart!" The instant she said it, the paradox hit her. Her life was falling apart *because* she was so controlling. As Tracy built self-trust and openness, her ability to trust

and to appreciate others grew. She had started leading with Character.

Character transforms; Coping tends to be more of a reactive, survival mode. When we are in a Coping pattern, we tend to see problems as existing outside ourselves. We say to ourselves, "If I could only change this person or that situation, then everything would be fine." But life's problems are rarely resolved by only changing the external situation. Lasting solutions involve dealing with our internal situation in order to transform the external circumstance. Imagine Nelson Mandela saying, "I better leave South Africa. The problems here are insurmountable. These people just don't get it. I need to go to a comfortable, accommodating country." Imagine President Obama thinking similarly as the oil spill worsened each day. When Character and purpose are weak, our initial Coping response is usually to leave or escape our situation. When purpose is strong, leaders transform their circumstances.

Leading with Character isn't easy. One CEO noted: "Most organizations reward Coping. We talk about Character, but we reward Coping. We extol the values of trust, inclusion, and adding value, but we reward control, image, and short-term results. We are unwilling to do the hard work and to take the personal risk to lead from Character."

Sadly, many LD and coaching programs reinforce refining Coping rather than fostering on Character. Executives are coached *how to act* instead of *how to be*. It's a charm-school process that produces only superficial, short-term results. Executives are coached to polish the exterior, but rarely does any substantial and sustained growth occur. Under sufficient stress, all the old patterns return. LD character development must be intimately connected to produce enduring leadership contribution.

To be effective, executive coaching needs to build awareness of the limiting aspects of Coping behaviors so that Character can be primary and Coping secondary. Penetrating Coping mechanisms to allow Character to come forth requires sophisticated development and coaching that deals with the whole person. In times of uncertainty and stress, we need that soldier confronting us with those three questions: *Who* are you? *Where* are you going? *Why* are you going there? Leaders of character wrestle with these questions daily. LE

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ACTION: *Lead with character from the inside out.*