Chapter One

Discovering What Matters

The raw material of leadership communication is something besides flesh, bone, and expertise in a field. To inspire others means not only developing the talent to operate in a given domain, but also cultivating the character traits, habits, and internal response patterns that attract others' engagement. Those who get it right stand out.

I first met Gary Fiedel at a spiritual retreat in the early 1980s. In quiet conversation, I learned that he was an accountant in a town very near my own home, and I learned about his background in the streets of Brooklyn. Gary's were not the suburban streets but the streets that had walk-up apartments not far from Coney Island. When Gary was in his teens, he met some friends who had fairly rough ideas of what life was about. Within a few years, his life was on a track that might well have ended in some kind of violence, perhaps in the Brooklyn pool hall where he was a partner or some other place of street worship.

During some particularly dangerous times, Gary had the good sense to take a trip to Los Angeles to visit with one of his old associates who had escaped the neighborhood. His friend had become an accountant, and—through what Gary says was "sheer good luck"—he was able to apprentice with his friend, and over the next few years move to Northern California and set up his own small accounting practice. He married and had a son. The marriage ended in divorce, Gary went on a pre-midlife spiritual quest, and we ended up at the same retreat in the basement of a San Francisco church.

I shared a little of my own frustration with Gary. I too was divorced, and I too was in the very early stages of setting up a

small business. But unlike Gary, I worried every day whether the ATM would give me the minimum $20. Aside from a little prayer that I said in front of that banking altar every couple of days, I felt I had no control over my cash flow or revenue stream. A week after the retreat, Gary arrived unannounced at my office door, pulled a few files from the single-drawer cabinet, and told me he would bring them back in a week. When he did, he delivered my first set of financial reports, and gave me instructions to send him my cash receipts, my checkbook register, and my credit card bills every month. He said he would bill me when I could afford it.

This was an extraordinary act of faith, and I never forgot it. When I called Gary's house to thank him, I connected with an old-style answering machine with a new-style message: "Hi, this is Gary, and this is not an answering machine, it is a questioning machine! The two questions are, 'Who are you?' and 'What do you want?'" Then there was a pause, and the message added, "and if you think those are trivial questions, consider that 95 percent of the population goes through life and never answers either one!"

I have later heard that greeting attributed to various people, but it was Gary Fiedel's version that stuck with me. Gary is still at his post, some thirty years later, and those questions still ring true. While I certainly had enough life experience to suggest that I was searching for the answers to those questions, I had never asked them explicitly. I was surprised and inspired by the power of the questions in my own life, and now I find them indispensable to my work with would-be or actual leaders. Leaders simply must know their own values if they are to inspire others. Gary's "questioning machine" was a reminder. I had had an inkling a few years earlier.

Who Are You?

I started my first career with IBM in San Francisco and was fortunate to have an upstanding, experienced older manager, David Gaisford. Dave frequently focused us on meaningful questions that to a twenty-six-year-old upstart sounded unnecessarily deep. Our crew of salespeople would meet once a week in a large conference room to share stories of the preceding week. At one such

meeting, Dave posed the question, "Who are you?" He asked us to write down our discoveries and then share them around the table. I remember starting to perspire as my peers began to write. I was the youngest at the table, and did not want to have to speak first. Fortunately, the gauntlet started six or seven people in front of me, so by the time it was my turn, I had heard the drift of the conversation—what seemed to be a safe and appropriate response—and was prepared to ape my somewhat older colleagues. As fate would have it, the person to my right was an older member of the group, a man of about forty named Ed McDannell. Ed had been in Vietnam in the Navy and had seen significant combat action in the Mekong Delta.

The generally accepted responses kept coming. One by one, the salespeople shared who they were. Nearly all of the answers reflected roles that they played in life or hobbies that they enjoyed: "I'm a husband," "I'm a father," "I'm a baseball fan," "I'm a loving son." I felt very safe—until it was Ed's turn.

He looked up at the group, scanned the room, and with penetrating eyes and a clear voice, and from a place of his experience of war, he simply and firmly said, "I am a free man!" and put down his paper.

The room was quiet, and I immediately felt my skin start to moisten. I was trapped with no identity that meant anything at all. Ed had raised the bar higher than I could jump, but my embarrassment was not about what I had listed on my paper, it was about my failure to understand the question at its root. I've never made that mistake again. Values trump the roles you might play in your life . . . not the other way around.

What Do You Want?

Many years after IBM and only a couple of years after my encounter with Gary, I met William Miller, at the time manager of the Program on Innovation at Stanford Research Institute. William has since published several books on innovation and creativity; he now consults on global values-based innovation from his home in India.

As we drank coffee around a bistro table, William suggested that "What do you want?" really means, "What are you here to

do?" and I quickly saw his point. Having spent my adult life in the San Francisco Bay Area, I was treated, long ago, to the *San Francisco Chronicle* columns of Eric Hoffer, philosopher-cum-longshoreman, whose longest-lived aphorism is "You can never get enough of what you don't need to make you happy." William's corollary to Gary's questions reflects this added insight. People who will successfully lead progress are concerned not only with their personal needs but also with making a difference in the lives of others, and in the life of an organization or a group moving toward a specific new future. The character of the individual, not any physical or emotional wants, is central to this ability to lead.

William went on to tell me of a test that he uses with prospective clients. During the initial interview, he casually reaches into his briefcase and places three books on the desk. Two are about some facet of the field of the prospect (say, business or public administration); the third is a work about the human condition (such as psychology, philosophy, or spirituality). "Invariably," says William, "whenever I'm facing someone I end up working with, the prospect will ignore the works about the field of endeavor and ask about the other, and it doesn't seem to matter in which order the books are stacked!" This is a good sign that the potential leader is interested in values, not merely techniques that have been effective in a given field. Such a leader is interested in making progress happen from a firm human foundation.

But to even define progress, we have to have a sense of qualitative difference or value—of what we will stand for. The ability to find, articulate, and translate our identity depends largely on our maturity in life and on our experience, as it requires reflection, not merely reading good management books.

An authentic vision for progress doesn't just appear out of the ether, nor does it simply grow from what others believe to be important. Passion about what we want to change grows from the foundation of values that have been formed by our life experience. These values are vital to us personally, not because they are socially acceptable, not because they look good on a plaque on the wall (although both might be true), but because we have actually experienced them to be true.

Warren Bennis, who has studied leadership longer than any other American scholar, continues to stress the need for such

self-knowledge for being effective as an agent of progress. When reflecting on his own performance as president of the University of Cincinnati, he found that when he was most effective it was because he knew what he wanted. It was that experience that drew Bennis to define the first competency of leadership as the *"management of attention."*[1] He continued to stress this need for focus on the delineation of individual values: "Anyone who wants to express himself fully and truly must have a point of view. Leadership without perspective and point of view isn't leadership—and of course it must be your own perspective, your own point of view. You cannot borrow a point of view any more than you can borrow someone else's eyes. It must be authentic, and if it is, it will be original, because you are an original."[2]

I'm dismayed by the number of men and women I interview who have retired from leadership positions decrying their failure to take time for personal reflection while they were active in their post. Even more, current clients also report a paucity of time to think, to ponder, to expand. This phenomenon is simply getting worse as electronic media demand attention 24/7. I've now adopted two principles of interviewing that I use to help a board decide on a new leader. Initially, I make it clear that I'm not looking for someone who is looking for a job or someone who is looking for more money. I'm looking for someone who has something to do in life and is looking for a place to do it. Then I ask, "What have you done, in the last twelve months, with your own money and on your own time, to develop your capability to lead?"

In general, people assume leadership positions in organizations that they did not found, and rather than initially considering the impact they might make on the organization and proceeding from a foundation of values, they define themselves as they go along. First they accept the old tenets of the organization, and only gradually, if ever, discover what is important to them personally. This trial-and-error method of leadership often results in an inconsistent message and a lack of commitment by those engaged in the enterprise.

Leaders who either make it clear that they have internalized the old set of dominant values or who gravitate the organization to a set that reflects their own beliefs make a substantial mark

on the organization. Those who do not make their values clear become caretakers—and they are often replaced when the first significant challenge faces the enterprise. John Sculley successfully made this transition at Apple. His successors Michael Spindler and Gil Amelio did not. Spindler was to put the financial ship right, while Amelio was to lead Apple to a new vision. Unfortunately, Amelio seemed to have no idea what he wanted to do at Apple before he assumed the leadership of this deeply passionate company. By the time he started to communicate his ideas nearly a year had gone by, and nearly all of the early enthusiasm of a great number of dedicated people had drained out of the company. It took the re-ascendance of Steve Jobs, the spiritual leader of this firm, to right it.

Jobs had the secret of knowing who he was. Years later, in 2005, he was to reveal more specifics in a speech to the graduating class at Stanford. "I'm convinced," he said, "that the only thing that kept me going was that I loved what I did. You've got to find what you love."[3] Jobs was able to make the transition back into Apple because he loved that it stood for his values, not because it made money.

Lou Gerstner successfully made the transition at IBM. John Ackers, the previous CEO, did not. Gerstner changed IBM fundamentally—from a hardware company to a systems integrator and service company. Ackers, who had come from the same lineage as every other IBM CEO, could not conceive of such a fundamental transformation. Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton successfully made the transition as president of the United States. The intervening president, George Bush Sr., did not. Although clearly a gracious and capable individual, he was "Reagan lite," and many people felt it.

Like Jobs, the successful leaders spoke frequently and effectively about their convictions. Former New York governor Mario Cuomo, arguably the best U.S. political communicator of the last three decades, reflects on his motivation to speak in his self-edited compendium *More Than Words*: "For me, the vital thing is that *there is something important I want to say. . . .* As I look back over the speeches I selected for this volume, I note that most of the things I was trying to say revolved around the *small cluster of basic ideas that have resonated with me for most of my adult life*" (emphasis mine).[4]

These core ideas (the rule of law, insistence on a sense of responsibility, the rejection of the melting pot for the mosaic view of our multiculturalism, the need for seeing our disparate society as a family, the belief that work is better than welfare, and the idea that economic growth is the provider of the American dream) were the topics for Cuomo's best-planned speeches, the ones he considers his most definitive. It's important to note that these principles formed the basis for his informal communication as well. They defined Cuomo as a leader. This is the primary function of a Personal Leadership Communication Guide. It has been described as "a biography with a purpose."

You too will find that a very few ideas constitute the core of your philosophy. These principles are more than a point of view; they are the tenets you believe to be vital to address, the questions that you wrestle with intellectually and emotionally, and they probably represent the quandaries of your personal life as well; perhaps in different dress, but the same nonetheless.

Delineating your point of view, then, is the first step toward communicating authentically. You don't have to write eloquent speeches, but you do have to develop and refine the message or messages that define you.

As you explore the creation of a Personal Leadership Communication Guide in the second half of the book, your fundamental values will be holding the pen. Simply put, a person who is not at least struggling with these questions of "Who are you?" and "What are you here to do?" just can't lead. Any message about significant change constructed without reflection on its importance to you personally will not inspire you, and will not, therefore, inspire others. To engage in the search for answers to these questions, you don't have to look far. The answers are inside you, sometimes eager to get out.

Recognizing and Reflecting on Your Point of View— Defining Moments

Every idea that you hold passionately has a background in your personal experience. Two of the bases of predictive psychology are first, that our beliefs are a product of our past teachings, and second, that those things learned through actual experience

and personal observation have more power to form our future than ideas learned by abstract examination.

The personal nature of our life path has roots in ancient lore. The Greeks claimed that our life force is guided by *daimons* or attending spirits who define our destiny. Our daimon, believed the Greeks, invites us to certain life experiences and keeps us from others in order to further our development. The late James Hillman, the world's most noted archetypal psychologist, compared this daimon to similar beliefs in other traditions: "Hindus speak of karma; Romans would have called this ghost your genius. . . . In our century, [the concept] has reappeared as Jung's 'Wise Old Man' and 'Wise Old Woman,' who, Jung says, are 'configurations of the guiding Self.' "[5] According to the tradition of depth psychology, our life experiences, particularly trials that might result in neurosis, are not necessarily to be cured, but rather to serve as guideposts to our future. By contrast, much of the Freudian approach regards many of our most influential and powerful past experiences as occurrences to live down or recover from. In this view, neuroses are to be cured, not observed for meaning.

Certainly there are cases where recovery is needed; but our feelings, compassion, conviction, and dedication to study are strengthened by our entire past, both good and bad experiences. At the extreme, the most compassionate counselors are those who have themselves experienced tragedy, addiction, or poverty, and the strongest leaders are those who have experienced or personally witnessed the negative effects of the status quo and the subsequent transformative power of change.

Steve Jobs cited his three defining moments when he spoke to the Stanford graduating class—leaving school, getting fired, and being diagnosed with cancer—and suggested that only in retrospect he could see that they were connected by a thread of always doing what he loved—quite a revelation, considering that at least two of his three defining moments would normally be considered negative.

For three hundred years, therapists and spiritual healers have searched for their subjects' defining moments, whether through hypnosis, regression, or talking therapy. Without regard to the complexity of analysis, the process of remembering is simple, just

as Jobs discovered. Reflect on what has actually influenced your behaviors and attitudes. Identify those specific life experiences that you remember as significant, and then identify the value associated with that experience. If done with honesty, this kind of exercise will lead you to the basis for your own leadership, the fundamentals of a defining message, perhaps even to the institution within which you want to lead.

Howard Schultz found himself, at seven years old, with a father who had broken his leg on the job and a mother who took in washing from others just to make ends meet. He saw that his father had been worn down by the system. He had gone from one job to another, never having health insurance, and when he got hurt, he didn't work, and the family didn't eat. Schultz grew up to found Starbucks, and later wrote about his response to his father's plight:

> Years later, that image of my father—slumped on the family couch, his leg in a cast, unable to work or earn money, and ground down by the world—is still burned into my mind. Looking back now, I have a lot of respect for my dad. He never finished high school, but he was an honest man who worked hard. . . .
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> The day he died, of lung cancer, in January 1988, was the saddest of my life. He had no savings, no pension. More important, he had never attained fulfillment and dignity from work he found meaningful.
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> As a kid, I never had any idea that I would one day head a company. But I knew in my heart that if I was ever in a position where I could make a difference, I wouldn't leave people behind.[6]

What value did Schultz generate from this experience? It was the value of never leaving anyone behind, of creating a real sense of community. Schultz grew up determined to craft a place that would nurture those who worked there. As a result of that value, he successfully lobbied the SEC to grant stock to part-time Starbucks employees. Walk into any Starbucks and ask the employee behind the counter if they like working there and why, and you will see the reflection of Howard Schultz's image of his father on

that couch. Most feel included. Few feel left behind. On the basis of his principles, Schultz was able to re-emerge as CEO in 2009 and rebuild a floundering Starbucks back to even greater success.

Communicating Through the Prism of Your Values

Merely discovering what matters will not assure that you can communicate to inspire. When I ask my executive classes to identify leaders of any period who were the most effective at inspiring others, the lists are remarkably consistent. Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Joan of Arc, John F. Kennedy, Margaret Thatcher, Abraham Lincoln, and Anwar Sadat are always on the list. Spiritual leaders are consistently mentioned as well: Gandhi, Mohammed, Jesus, Siddhartha.

What do these people have in common?

Without hesitation, the group responds with words like *passion, commitment,* and *self-knowledge.* Often they miss the obvious, that people in this rare group were willing and able to communicate with others using the raw material of their own conviction. Clearly, these leaders were courageous enough to communicate authentically from the basis of their real values, whether they were giving speeches, advocating a cause, writing memos, or conversing informally. Whatever the venue, their commitment came through. We use words like *destined* or *fated* to describe the strength of their conviction, yet each of us has that calling, some louder than others, some more cluttered with other noise; nonetheless, our daimon is not just beckoning us to life, it is calling us to express ourselves.

Distilling Values into Conviction

In my executive and graduate school classes in leadership communication, each participant spends a significant amount of time developing a single message. I ask them to choose their topic by answering these questions:

- Given your defining moments, and the values associated with them, what condition in your chosen industry would you change and how?

- What is the most important social issue we have to deal with as a community (world, nation, state, etc.)? How would you correct it?
- What causes and goals receive the time, treasure, and talent you devote to personal philanthropy?

Participants are required to have had some personal experience in the issue that will illustrate how they formed their position on the subject. At the end of the process, they develop a Personal Leadership Communication Guide.

Developing the Guide reveals some solid conviction. Additionally, executives and graduate students alike realize before the program's end that the topic questions are interlaced; that is, their *values* create their conviction, whether it is about the value itself or about one of the applications of the value in business or society. For example, one student, Rob Nicholson, chose to communicate about the preservation of the environment, imploring others to take steps toward conservation of natural resources. This is a fairly common topic in California, as many people are environmentally conscious, especially on university campuses, perhaps particularly so at UC Berkeley. Accordingly, it is difficult to move people to further action; they believe they are already doing enough.

But Rob was not a typical conceptual environmentalist. A native of Canada, he related his own personal experience of observing lakes near his hometown lose their fish population to acid rain. He quoted a space shuttle astronaut's observation that there were only two manmade landmarks visible from space . . . the Great Wall of China and a massive old-growth clear-cut in Rob's home province. He was highly credible, as he had studied environmental science as an undergraduate, and he made an authentic connection with his fellow students through his strong personal conviction—an outgrowth of his personal experience.

Rob could draw on his environmental experience to communicate metaphorically about business or political issues. The preservation of capital, the efficient use of by-products, the idea of personal responsibility for the greater good—these topics and others could be addressed using these same events to stimulate his own conviction. The strength of this message resulted from

Rob's reflection on a single question, and his use of the answer to develop the message. Today, fifteen years after developing that original Communication Guide, Rob is still involved in expressing those values. He is now in Toronto, having plied his talents in investment banking in San Francisco, New York, and indeed around the world. Many of his funded projects involve alternative energy, and his lifestyle and chosen location and company reflect his belief in collaboration and connection rather than competitive financial wrangling. In a recent conversation, Rob said that he realizes that he has done business with many of the same people through the years because he was able to develop lasting relationships and trust with them—another value that he revealed in his days at Berkeley.

Others too, interviewed in earlier editions and whose stories are updated in this edition, have found their Communication Guides useful in defining their life's work. In 2002, Josie Gaillard's Guide was a plea and a plan for energy independence for the United States. After gaining her MBA, she worked for a solar panel company, and now she and her husband are building an energy-neutral home; she owns and operates a virtual store, Living Ethos (www.livingethos.com), that offers eco-friendly gift wraps and other similar earth-friendly products. Rebekah Saul Butler expanded her class conviction about end-of-life decisions to a professional interest in the cost of health care, an issue she is engaged in as program director of a philanthropic foundation.

Whether you are a student, a rising executive, or a seasoned politician, contemplating your life story will often yield not just one but an array of individual values as well as their relative importance. Accordingly, I ask each corporate and political client to prepare an autobiography as a first step toward learning to communicate authentically. I request that they pay particular attention to events in their past that seem like turning points, events that have prompted fundamental decisions about the relative importance of ideas, things, and behaviors. We then use these events to construct complete Communication Guides around fundamental themes, drawing out their authentic concerns.

In late 1994, I worked with the executive team of a small company, Taylor-Made Office Systems, to help them redefine their vision and values. In the process I became close friends with

Barry Taylor, the founder and CEO, and discovered that he had been orphaned as a boy, started his business as a very young man, and delivered his product to customers from his own second-hand truck. In addition, he had been divorced twice and had tragically lost a teenage son in an accident. These events and his many specific vivid memories of them shaped his values.

Barry had grown his company to three hundred employees and nearly $150 million, but it still exemplified his basic values. Is it any wonder that he emphasizes a strong family feeling, independence, and the need to serve the customer above all else? To this entrepreneur, these values did not come from a quick read of popular management books, they came from his life, and they carried with them all the authenticity of his own passion and conviction.

Barry has since sold his original company, regrouped, and started two others with the same fundamental values at their core. In addition, he and his wife Elaine have funded and built a summer camp for kids with cancer—an outgrowth of his own childhood and the values that it formed.

Like Barry Taylor, Ed McDannell, Dave Gaisford, Mario Cuomo, Howard Schultz, Rob Nicholson, Steve Jobs, William Miller, Gary Fiedel, Rebekah Saul-Butler, Josie Gaillard, and every other leader who has led change effectively, each of us has something unique to say, and it is based on our particular makeup and our rich and sometimes dire experience. To communicate as an authentic leader, you have to look for your own daimon, look into your own experience, and find those themes that are most important to you.

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The well of human experience is indeed deep. But the treasures are worth the effort of going into this water, especially if you want to have a conscious and meaningful impact on the world in which you live. You don't need to sit in a cave for twenty years; at least some of the treasure is accessible in your normal life's context. Once you discover the themes that matter most to you, you can convert them to inspiration for others—but only if you are courageous, disciplined, and emotionally attuned enough to do so.