

Leading with Soul

An Uncommon Journey of Spirit, New & Revised Edition

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In Search of Soul and Spirit

All day I think about it, then at night I say it.

Where did I come from,

and what am I supposed to be doing?

I have no idea.

My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,

and I intend to end up there.

-Rumi

Soul. The word sometimes sounds strange to the modern ear. Terms like heart and spirit seem almost as exotic. We rarely think or talk about where we came from or what we are here to do. We need to. Otherwise, we deaden our souls, stunt our spirits, and live our lives halfheartedly.

The search for soul and spirit, for depth and meaning in our lives, is fueling a powerful and growing twenty-first-century movement. It is a contemporary quest for depth, meaning, and faith that transcends boundaries of gender, age, geography, and race. It's as fresh and contemporary and specific to our time as the latest dot-com start-up. It's emerging as a counterforce to the modern technical mind-set that can land a man on the moon yet provides few answers for bringing joy to life or meaning to work.

At the same time this contemporary search is grounded in the age-old journey of the soul that has been a core preoccupation of every human culture since the beginning of time. Over the centuries, people have found meaning in work, family, community, and shared faith. They have drawn upon collective resources to do what they could not do alone. United efforts—raising a barn, shoring a levee, rescuing earthquake victims, celebrating a marriage, or singing a hymn—have brought people together, created enduring bonds, and exemplified the possibilities in collective spirit. Such traditional sources of meaning, energy, and achievement are now seriously endangered. More and more individuals are pondering a question posed by Jesus two thousand years ago: What does it profit us if we gain the world but lose our souls?¹

The signs of spiritual hunger and restlessness are everywhere. Something's missing—an elusive, nagging something. Not long ago, Warren Bennis asked a group of young dot-com millionaires about their work and reported: "They were vaguely disconsolate—despairing—something 'beyond words' one told me, 'something missing.' A severe case of

influenza, I thought. I also wondered: 'What was missing?'"²

We are convinced that what's really missing is soul and spirit. Some people experience this gap as a haunting sense that somewhere along the line they got off track. They're working harder than ever, but they're not sure why, and they've lost touch with what's really important in life. For others, life feels like a forced march. They can never get off the treadmill, even though they don't know where they're going. Still others feel it as a vague emptiness that pursues them relentlessly as they rush madly through life. They hope they can escape if they keep running. Deep down, they know they're losing the race. There are countless other ways individuals may experience this sense of spiritual emptiness: as a lack of zest and joy, as ennui, as depression, as an aching, debilitating impression that one's life is going nowhere.

All these experiences are clues, symptoms of spiritual malaise—a hollow, existential vacuum that can be filled only by a greater attention to soul, spirit, and faith. This disease of the spirit often feels unique and personal. And it is. But it's also shared. Too many workplaces are almost devoid of meaning and purpose. They are ruled by technology, efficiency, and the bottom line, with little regard for what human beings need in order to experience personal fulfillment and success. Over time, this takes a heavy toll on motivation, loyalty, and performance. It is a road to crisis and decay—unless we find ways to reinfuse the workplace with passion, zest, and spirit.

More and more people are working to recapture the essence of what soul and spirit can bring to the modern workplace. As Matthew Fox writes: "Life and livelihood ought not to be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about Spirit. Spirit means life, and both life and livelihood are about living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of contribution to the greater community. A spirituality of work is about bringing life and livelihood back together again. And spirit with them."³

The reemergence of spirituality has grown well beyond the yearnings of a few lost souls. It's evolving into a broad social movement, a shared undertaking. It needs to be shared, because we can't all go it alone. This movement is gathering strength not just in North America but throughout the world. Just one indicator of this growth is that the first edition of *Leading with Soul* has been translated for readers in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. Letters to the authors from readers around the world sound remarkably similar themes and raise many of the same questions. In the Postlude we share some of those questions and our responses to them. We also invite readers to continue the dialogue.

Even before the first edition of this book came out, we had begun to share its message with a variety of audiences. The depth and power of their responses were surprising and gratifying. People thanked us for saying things that needed to be said, for putting words to concerns they had struggled to voice, and for validating a dialogue that they were eager to have with colleagues, friends, and family.

When we began hearing from readers who accepted our first edition invitation to write and share personal reactions, the calls and letters brought moving stories of individual readers' own journeys—sometimes heartwarming, sometimes poignant. We heard from scores of individuals who were searching for a more meaningful life at work and at home. Of course, not all reactions to *Leading with Soul* have been positive. Our friend Father Paul Keenan, himself an author and the host of a New York City talk show, read reviews of our book and concluded that there was little middle ground. The book, in his

view, hits people in one of two ways: either they like it a lot or they think it's worthless.⁴

Over time, both readers and critics have helped us understand why reactions have been so polarized. As one perceptive reviewer noted, the book requires readers to step out of customary modes of reading passively in search of answers or information. It asks them instead to become active and engaged by reflecting on and interpreting the text's meaning for them. What readers bring to the text and find between the lines is even more important than what we have written. This book works to the degree that people become active coauthors and cocreators. Many readers have done this so well that they have found messages that go well beyond anything we can take credit for. We have also heard from readers who found little in the book on first reading yet reported that it had a powerful, even dramatic impact when they revisited it a year or two later.

When *Leading with Soul* first appeared, it was part of a tiny trickle of books addressing spirituality at work. The trickle

has since grown into a tide that shows no signs of ebbing.⁵ In that outpouring is a rich and yeasty diversity of voices and approaches. Some books approach spirituality in the context of a specific religious tradition, such as Christianity, Judaism, or Buddhism. Some focus on a specific practice, such as meditation. Some are handbooks or primers offering suggestions and guidelines for adding spiritual depth to one's life. But almost all focus on soul and spirit.

Soul and spirit are so interconnected that the two words are often used interchangeably, but we see an important distinction. Soul is personal and unique, grounded in the depths of personal experience. When each of us plunges into the depths at the core of our being, there we find soul. Spirit is transcendent and all embracing. It is the universal source, the oneness of all things: God, Jahweh, Allah, and the Buddha. Soul and spirit are related in the same way as peaks and valleys, male and female. They are intimately connected. Each needs the other. Leaders with soul bring spirit to organizations. They marry the two so that spirit feeds soul rather than starving it and soul enriches spirit rather than killing it. Leaders of spirit find their soul's treasure store and offer its gifts to others.⁶

Books about spirituality often speak from a specific religious tradition. That is not our objective. It has been said that "spirituality is the goal, religion is the path."⁷ But it is not the only path. The word religion implies a group of people bound together by a vision of the divine expressed through shared beliefs, institutions, rituals, and artifacts. Every great religion offers special gifts based on its unique spiritual tradition. Other paths fall outside established religion. Alcoholics Anonymous offers its widely respected, highly successful twelve-step program to help its members find meaning in a life without alcohol. AA's approach is explicitly spiritual, insisting that members place their trust not in themselves but in a higher power. At the same time, individuals are free to interpret that power as they choose.

Leading with Soul has an ecumenical intent. Ours is a diverse and inclusive caravan, and we invite spiritual seekers of all backgrounds and persuasions to join us in the search for something bigger. Our goal is not to teach a specific theology or philosophy but to pose questions and stimulate reflection to help you deepen the faith you have or find the one you need. We invite you to become a coauthor. Treat the stories and ideas in these pages as a stimulus and a starting point. Test them against your own knowledge and experience. Talk to yourself and your friends, and talk back to us. Ask hard questions. Fill in the gaps and holes you find in what we have produced by writing your own story and exploring your own path. Look for opportunities to share your reflections and questions with others. Talk about the path you and your family or you and your

colleagues are following. Where is your journey taking you? Is that really where you want to go? As someone once observed, follow the highway and you'll probably arrive at a destination; follow your heart and you may leave a trail.

We particularly hope that this book will stimulate a journey in search of your leadership gifts. Each of us has a special contribution to make if we can shoulder the personal and spiritual work needed to discover and take responsibility for our own gifts. Across sectors and levels, organizations are starved for the leadership they need. Two misleading images currently dominate organizational thinking about leadership: one the heroic champion with extraordinary stature and vision, the other the "policy wonk," the skilled analyst who solves pressing problems with information, programs, and policies. Both these images emphasize the hands and heads of leaders, neglecting deeper and more enduring elements of courage, spirit, and hope. Leaders who have lost touch with their own souls, who are confused and uncertain about their core values and beliefs, inevitably lose their way or sound an uncertain trumpet.

It is easy to go astray when we forget that the heart of leadership is in the hearts of leaders. We fool ourselves, thinking that sheer bravado or analytical techniques can respond to our deepest concerns. We lose touch with the deepest and most precious of human gifts-soul and spirit. To recapture spirit, we need to relearn how to lead with soul: How to know ourselves and our faith at the deepest level. How to breathe new zest and buoyancy into life. How to reinvigorate the family as a sanctuary where people can grow, develop, and find love. How to reinfuse the workplace with vigor and élan. Leading with soul returns us to ancient spiritual basics-reclaiming the enduring human capacity that gives our lives passion and purpose.

The chapters ahead explore soul, spirit, and faith and why they belong at the heart of leadership. They do this through a dialogue between a beleaguered leader and a wise sage. Over the centuries, spiritual leaders of all traditions and faiths have taught and learned through example, story, and dialogue. Christian and Sufi parables, Zen koans, the Jewish Haggadah, Hindu legends, and Native American stories are but a few examples. In our story, you are invited to join Steve Camden, a highly successful, fast-track manager who has run into an existential wall, as he works with Maria, a spiritual mentor. Many readers, both men and women, have told us they identify with Steve-his confusion, his yearning, his sense of being lost and stuck. Many have also told us they were fortunate enough to have a Maria who provided them critical guidance at key moments in their lives. Others have written to say they desperately need a Maria and wonder if we know where to find one.

This story is a parable drawn from the authors' own lives and the lives of others we have known. We hope it speaks to you. To assist your reflections, we punctuate the story with a series of interludes-meditations on the issues and questions raised in the story. Some readers tell us the interludes were indispensable in clarifying and deepening their reading experience. Others report the opposite-the interludes were unwelcome interruptions,

and they preferred to follow the story straight through. As a coadventurer, you should choose the path through the book that works best for you. We also commend to you the counsel of Walt Whitman:

Sail forth-steer for the deep waters only,

Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee,

and thou with me,

For we are bound where mariner has not yet

dared to go,

And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!

O farther farther sail!

O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the

seas of God?8

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