

Preface

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

I wrote this book before the full impact of the Covid-19 virus hit us. The impact has produced devastating damage and changes to the way we work and socialize that will have far-reaching effects. The forced isolation has fuelled anxiety, fear, depression and grief. At the same time, physical distancing and isolation have presented us with opportunities to relate and work differently, and given us substantially more time for self-reflection and self-awareness.

A Personal Story

My father, Brinley Williams was a great man. He knew what was important in life and how to conduct himself honorably and with humility. He was deeply self-reflective and was the most self-aware person I have ever known. Brinley had a difficult and challenging life, yet he exuded a quiet, powerful confidence and stillness that had a calming effect on me and all those who knew him. I loved to hear his life stories about his childhood working in the coal mine in Wales, leaving home at the tender age of 14, and at the age of 16

(with his parents' blessing), joining the British Army and serving in the Middle East for eleven dangerous years.

He went on to work for the British Foreign Service and was stationed in Hong Kong starting in the early 1930's. Which is where he met my mother who had immigrated to Hong Kong from Mexico. My father, mother, sister and brother were taken prisoner by the Japanese upon their invasion in 1941, and spent the remainder of the WWII in Stanley Internment Camp.

My parents did not like to speak about their brutal experience in the camp, and as I had been born in the POW camp, one month before the end of the war, I had few memories to rely upon. I'm thankful to my older sister, who remembered those years and readily shared her painful memories with me.

Toward the end of his life, when I was a grown man, my father more readily shared life his story with me. One day, we walked together in his garden among the award-winning flowers that he loved so much.

He pulled a weed out of the garden by his feet as he talked. He told me how he had survived the childhood years in the coal mine in Wales, and desert warfare in the Middle East while in the British Army; and the Battle for Hong Kong; then the years in the Hong Kong POW camp and years of recuperation after. As he spoke of those times, it was clear to me it was his ability to go to a place of calmness, and stillness, separated from the chaos around him that enabled him to survive and help his family survive. He said he was able to go to that private and powerful place within him to reach his innermost thoughts and feelings, and that gave him the strength to go on living, to survive the worst.

Every day in the POW camp, he said, he would find a quiet corner of the camp after his duties for family were done, and quietly contemplate his inner feelings, and then focus on one thought-- "let's get through today." For almost four years he had to be a pillar of strength and calm and help his family deal with insufficient food, appalling conditions and protect them as much as he could from the brutality of the Japanese captors. His biggest test was when my mother miraculously became pregnant with me, but became very ill, and the camp doctor didn't think she or I would live. He had to tell my brother and sister that she might die. We both survived—barely.

In his retirement years, my father loved to spend quiet times in solitude, either reading fiction, working in the garden, painting or writing, or simply reflecting. It's not that he was anti-social or lonely. Indeed, he had spent his life in public service consistently interacting with others and his family. It's that he valued the time with himself for reflection.

Brinley Williams was keenly aware of his emotions and the impact he had on others. It was my experience with him that stimulated my interest in self-awareness and prompted me to make sincere efforts at self-mastery.

He knew who he was, and it was apparent in every word he spoke and action he took with great consistency. And this personal mastery gave him the skills and power to be more sensitive to and intuitive with other people, as well as emanate a great strength and resilience.

In contrast, so many leaders today lack that self-awareness.

Leadership is in crisis today. Leaders in organizations and institutions worldwide have failed to deliver on their promises,

inspire people and initiate changes to improve people's well-being and that of our planet. In poll after survey, trust in our leaders is at an all-time low. In both government and business, media stories abound about corruption and wrong doing. All too often leaders act out of self-interest, blind to the welfare of others. The result often is political and social unrest, and declining productivity and well-being in the workplace.

Many observers and pundits have given explanations for the current negative state, ranging from the negative impact of technology to increasing polarization and tribalism of the population and income inequality, but many of those factors are external to the inner workings of people, and the solutions offered are often external as well. Rarely do the pundits look inside.

This book looks inside the minds and hearts of leaders as a perspective and strategy that could change the culture of organizations and address the issues identified above. I suggest that the development of greater self-awareness by leaders can be a powerful way of improving our working lives, and perhaps also our personal lives.

I argue that leader self-awareness as a core foundational piece of emotional intelligence has been relatively ignored as a leadership and organizational strategy, yet the benefits and positive impact can be significant.

Part of that strategy would be a shift from leader self-interest and focus on external things to a greater focus on a leader's thoughts, and emotions, which in turn impact the leader's decisions and actions.

Allied to this shift is the need for leaders to embrace solitude and quiet reflection time, which aids in self-awareness to improve the quality of their decisions, ideas and relationships.

This book describes the research on self-awareness and also outlines specific activities that leaders can engage in to improve their self-awareness. The book is a natural progression from my previous book, *Eye of the Storm: How Mindful Leaders Can Transform Chaotic Workplaces*, which examines in detail the benefits of mindfulness practices for leaders and the workplace.

The following is an example of a leader who struggled with self-awareness, with unfortunate results for him. I will call him Robert.

He sat behind his large desk and gazed out the floor to ceiling window at the city of skyscrapers. Behind him was a large screen TV tuned into CNBC. On his desk was an active computer, and in front of him on the desk was a large smartphone, with the active screen face up.

He was the CEO of a large company that was going through the process of reorganization and repositioning in the marketplace. His Board had recommended he engage an executive coach.

He called me.

Our first meeting was a revelation of his lack of self-control and egotism.

"I'm pissed off that we're not getting the results my team had committed to," he exclaimed in a loud voice, slamming his hand on the desk, "I made a commitment to the Board, and they'll hold me responsible."

As yet, we hadn't talked about what he hoped to accomplish with our coaching arrangement or an agenda for our first meeting.

"You're angry," I said calmly.

"Wouldn't you be too," he snapped, "if some people on your executive team were lazy or incompetent, or disloyal?" He turned and glanced at the stock market screen behind him and then glanced at the face of his smart-phone on his desk.

"How does that make you angry?" I inquired.

"The board expects results, and the hell if I'm going to take the fall for others' failures," he answered vehemently.

"So you're angry because the board is holding you accountable or because others won't be blamed for failure?"

He stared at me for a moment, but said nothing.

"So what's the outcome you want here?" I asked.

"It's obvious, isn't it? I want my team to produce results and fast. I made that abundantly clear."

A notification on his phone lit up and he picked it up to read, then looked at me with critical eyes.

Directly, I asked, "Is it possible you could be part of the problem?"

He laughed, glancing at his phone, and then his watch. "Get serious, Ray. And just a reminder, you're here to help me strategize ways to get my term functioning effectively. I'm not the problem."

This was not going to go well for Robert, I thought. “So what other emotions are you feeling right now about the situation?” I asked.

“My feelings have nothing to do with it. It’s obvious that I have a problem in some team members lacking the skills and attitude to do what is necessary.”

“What kinds of things might you do to motivate them to perform better?” I inquired.

“The only motivation they need is the threat of losing their jobs,” he replied, half laughing.

Glancing again up at the TV screen, then down to his watch, he added, “I’ve got to run to another meeting. Thanks for listening to my problem.”

And at that, he stood up, signalling the session was over.

As I was leaving, I said in an even tone, “Reflect on the questions I asked you today when you have some quiet alone time. And at our next meeting, let’s set some outcomes for our coaching process.”

He sighed, “Sure, if I get some time.”

I knew he would never get the time, and definitely would not get what he wanted from his organization. Despite his overconfidence and arrogance, his self-awareness was seriously impaired.

You’ll read more about Robert and what happened to him later in the book.

I’ve had this kind of conversation with varying degrees of seriousness with more than a few senior executives during my 35

years of working with leaders. It is reflective of a phenomenon all too commonplace in our organizations, where leaders see their organization's problems as someone else's fault. These leaders often exhibit a serious lack of self-awareness and the negative impact they have on others. And the results are often detrimental to the organization and ultimately the leader.

Along with this lack of self-awareness were the signs and behaviors of a fragmented way of working, which affected their ability to focus, and increased levels of stress, which included a constant and continual race to keep up to the e-mails, text messages, meetings, phone messages and conversations, with no time for reflection, and virtually no attempt at gathering their thoughts in solitude and quiet.

The workplace and job of leadership has changed. Traditional organizational structures, bureaucratic practices, and leader recruitment and promotion are still common in many of our institutions. Yet automation, a global economy, and the values of the younger generations are challenging these traditional structures and practices.

The successful leaders I've had the privilege of working with have developed rigorous habits which promote and enhance self-awareness and make them more effective and help them to rise to greatness. This book identifies, describes and promotes the importance of the process of "inside-out"-- the mastery of self, and incisive self-awareness that becomes the major stepping stone to great leadership.

Great leaders resonate with others because they know themselves and are attuned to what others think and feel. Learning how to be more aware of the perceptions of others is a skill set that

will benefit those who seek to be more effective as leaders or in any relationship. By understanding more about ourselves and our unconscious tendencies to self-deceive, we can improve our ability to build relationships, strengthen organizations, and confront the fears that cause us to live beneath our potential. Self-examination is a preparation for insight, a groundbreaking for the seeds of self-understanding which gradually bloom into changed behavior.

Great leaders have also recognized the importance of regularly seeking out quiet solitude and stillness to allow the brain to integrate a cascade of the thoughts and feelings that inundate them on a daily basis, understanding also that these quiet times can be a source of creativity.

Making the commitment to explore the inner reaches of our hearts and minds allows us to be true to ourselves and enables us to honor the duties we owe to self, others, and the society in which we live.

Now, more than ever, leaders in organizations need to raise their self-awareness both internally so that they are truly connected to their inner emotions, thoughts and perceptions, and externally, to see themselves as others see them, so that they can more accurately assess the impact they are making on others and the world.

Leaders require elevated self-awareness, self-reflection and the habit of seeking out quiet solitude to become great leaders in their organizations and communities.

It is my hope that this book can be a valuable resource for leaders, leadership trainers, consultants and coaches searching for ways leaders can be more successful, and fulfilled in their work.

Preface

Introduction

“Each man had only one genuine vocation—to find the way to himself...His task was to discover his own destiny—not an arbitrary one—and to live it out wholly and resolutely within himself.”

Herman Hesse

Today, there are multiple signs that organizations are exhibiting the signs of dysfunction and decay with a detrimental impact on the people who work there. This disturbing picture is punctuated by the absence and dysfunctions of leaders in our organizations and institutions. The result is chaos and unhealthy workplaces.

A contributing force to this disturbing situation is the lack of self-awareness of our leaders, along with our under appreciation of its importance.

A study by the non-profit Families and Work Institute showed that one in three American employees are chronically overworked. According to the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety, stress-related ailments cost companies \$200-\$300 billion annually. And 70-90% of employee hospital visits are linked to stress. Azagba and Mesbah Sharaf of the Department of Economics at Concordia University concluded that health care expenditures for employees with high levels of stress were 46% greater than at similar organizations without high levels of stress.

Today, the average worker works more hours per week than in 2000, and 37% of the population say they work on their vacation.

The most recent poll by Weber Shandwick reported that 65% of Americans say the lack of civility is a major problem that has worsened since the financial crisis and recession. What’s even more distressing is that nearly 50% of those surveyed said they were withdrawing from the basic tenants of democracy — government and politics — because of incivility and bullying.

In two surveys by the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) and Zogby International, where bullying was defined as "repeated mistreatment: Sabotage by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation and humiliation." And 35% of workers experienced bullying first hand, and 62% of the bullies were men. A Harris Interactive poll conducted in 2011 revealed that 34% of women reported being bullied in the workplace. A

U.S. News and World Report poll says that 89% of U.S. workers said incivility is a serious problem and 78% said it is getting worse.

The Conference Board of Canada's study, "Building Healthy Workplaces," estimates that 44% of Canadians say they've coped with a mental health problem such as extreme stress, substance abuse, schizophrenia, depression, burnout and addictions. The report went on to state that almost 50% of managers had no training in managing workers with mental health issues.

Research conducted in the past decade has shown that employee engagement has declined significantly in most industries, with some research citing as few as 29% of employees being actively engaged in their jobs.

Reports of "toxic workplaces" and "toxic bosses" proliferate news and social media stories, where a significant number of employees want to leave their jobs because of abusive bosses. In *The Corporation*, the hit 2003 documentary film, businesses are portrayed as psychopaths that can wreak havoc in the communities where they operate, something that is becoming increasingly commonplace.

Relentless demands, extreme pressure and ruthlessness are all trademarks of a toxic company, as is a twisted disconnect between what a firm says it does for employees and what it actually is doing. People are looked at as costs, rather than assets.

All these descriptions of dysfunctional and unhealthy organizations have been contrasted with progressive organizations and their leaders, who understand and value the well-being of employees as central to the long-term success of the organization.

The World Economic Forum's 2015 Survey on the Global Agenda revealed that 86% of respondents perceive a global crisis in leadership. The survey assessed the general concerns and issues about leadership, not the specific issue of leadership during a crisis. That deficiency is more disconcerting in the face of increasing global social, political and economic complexities and now, pandemics.

A study by Deloitte's Center for the Edge shows that the effectiveness of management in organizations has been steadily falling for the last 50 years.

In the past two decades, 30% of Fortune 500 CEOs have lasted less than 3 years. Top executive failure rates are as high as 75% and rarely less than 30%. Chief executives now are lasting 7.6 years on a global average down from 9.5 years in 1995. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, 2 out of 5 new CEOs fail in their first 18 months on the job.

According to the *National Leadership Index report*, 75% of organizations reported a deficit of leadership skills. Forty-two per cent of managers rate their own line-manager as ineffective; 70% of Americans still believe they have a crisis of leadership.

A 2016 Gallup poll found that only 18% of managers demonstrate a high level of talent for managing others--meaning a shocking 82% of managers aren't very good at leading people. Gallup estimated that this lack of leadership capability costs U.S. corporations up to \$550 billion annually.

In a 2016 McKinsey & Company study of more than 52,000 managers and employees, leaders rated themselves as better and more engaging than their employees did. This included 86% of leaders who believed they model the improvements they want employees to make, while another 77% of leaders believed they "inspire action."

Research shows when someone assumes a new or different leadership role they have a 40% chance of demonstrating disappointing performance. Furthermore, 82% of newly appointed leaders derail because they fail to build partnerships with subordinates and peers. Public poll after public poll has shown that people have lost confidence in our political and business leaders.

A study by the Corporate Leadership Council concluded that the billions upon billions of dollars spent on leadership training have improved productivity by only 2%.

It appears that the major reason for the failure has nothing to do with technical competence, or knowledge, or experience, but rather with hubris and ego, most often linked to a lack of emotional intelligence and particularly, self-awareness.

Leigh Branham, author of *7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave*, analyzed over 20,000 anonymous surveys asking employees why they left their last job. Although most managers believe pay is the primary reason people quit, Branham discovered that the number one reason actually is "loss of trust and confidence in senior leaders," and that loss of trust is often correlated to abusive or narcissistic bosses.

Psychologist and researcher Amy Brunell of Ohio State University has studied leadership and expresses concern about the prevalence of narcissism in leadership positions. Her study, published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology*, comes from a study of business managers. She says, "Narcissists have an inflated view of their talents and abilities and are all about themselves," adding, "It's not surprising that narcissists become leaders. They like power. They are egotistical, and they are usually charming and extraverted. The problem is they don't necessarily make better leaders."

In their book, *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work*, Paul Babiak and Robert Hare argue while psychopaths may not be ideally suited for traditional work environments by virtue of a lack of desire to develop good interpersonal relationships, they have other abilities such as reading people and masterful influence and persuasion skills that can make it difficult to see them as the psychopaths they are. According to their and others' studies, up to 25% of executives could be assessed as psychopaths, a much higher figure than the general population figure of 1%.

Manfred Kets de Vries, a distinguished Clinical Professor of Leadership Development and Organizational Change at INSEAD describes the corporate psychopath the "SOB — Seductive Operational Bully." SOBs don't usually end up in jail or psychiatric hospital but they do thrive in an organizational setting. SOBs can be found wherever power, status, or money is at stake, de Vries says.

David Dotlich and Peter C. Cairo, in their book, *Why CEOs Fail: The 11 Behaviors That Can Derail Your Climb to the Top and How to Manage Them*, present 11 cogent reasons why CEOs fail, most of which have to do with hubris, ego and a lack of emotional intelligence.

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, chief talent scientist at Manpower Group, a professor of business psychology at University College London and at Columbia University in New York City, an associate at Harvard's Entrepreneurial Finance Lab and author of the book *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? (and How to Fix It)*, asks the question and provides an answer "Have you ever worked with people who are not as good as they think they are ... men are typically more deceived about their talents than women are. And they are also more likely to succeed in their careers. That's because one of the best ways to fool other people into thinking you're better than you actually are is to fool yourself first."

Chamorrow-Premuzic asserts his research shows that so many men are incompetent because of these reasons: "First, we fail to distinguish between confidence and competence, and men are universally over-confident; the second reason is our love for charismatic individuals, fuelled by mass media; and the third reason is our inability to resist the allure of narcissistic individuals."

The result? Many leaders who are "unaware of their limitations and unjustifiably pleased with themselves, Chamorrow-Premuzic says, "They see leadership as an entitlement and they lack empathy and self-control, so they end up acting without integrity and indulging in reckless risks."

Ron Carucci, writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, describes the failures of modern leadership: "The pattern is clear, and diligent leaders often devote countless resources to planning out the perfect change management initiative. To raise the odds of success, however, my

experience suggests the place that leaders need to begin their transformation efforts is not their organizations: It's themselves."

All of this research and expert perspectives underscore the lack of and need for leaders with emotional intelligence, and enhanced self-awareness. We need leaders whose orientation is primarily inside-out, being grounded in their inner selves, and keenly aware of how others view them. We need leaders who are the masters of themselves first, before aspiring to be the masters of anyone else.

In the following chapters I provide a detailed look at self-awareness, self-reflection, including the negative and positive impacts of self-awareness by leaders, with suggestions on how self-awareness can be developed. I describe in detail the supporting elements of mindfulness, solitude and quiet which strengthen and expand the capacity for self-awareness. And finally, I provide both specific self-awareness and mindfulness assessments and activities that can assist readers in developing further their self-awareness.

This book is not about a return to some magical time in the past, where leadership was simple or straightforward. We can never return to the past.

This book is about seeing, recruiting, promoting, and believing in leaders who have focused on self-mastery, rather than the mastery of the external environment and things. It's about the power of self-awareness, self-reflection, mindfulness, and solitude that can powerfully connect with people to create a better present and better future for all of us.