

CHAPTER 22

COACHING AND LEADING AS STEWARDS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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COACHING, LIKE LEADING, lends itself to endless innovations and evolution. The evolution of leadership has covered a lot of territory—from Theory X, Theory Y, situational, values-driven, emotionally intelligent, and Level 5 leadership, among others. Likewise, coaching has evolved over time, including performance-based, behavioral, cognitive, systems thinking, neurolinguistics, emotional intelligence, somatic, and holistic coaching, to name a few prominent ones. One of the beauties of evolutionary biology is that in any of its forms it builds on what is, innovates, experiments, and evolves. It's nature's gift to life—continual awareness, feedback, and learning.

I see in the progression of coaching and leadership a parallel theme. Each in its own way is about stewardship and sustainability. What coaches and leaders do is steward vital resources. To be a steward is to care for and cultivate the things that matter in life and work. What we are here to do with our lives is to be stewards of that which we are given—whether it be as responsible stewards of our bodies, emotions, minds, spirits, families, communities, nations, global human community, wildlife, domesticated critters, or natural resources. When we steward these domains well, we act not only from a sense of self-interest, but from an *enlightened self-interest*—holding the long view—for individual sustainability as we live nested within and inseparable from the health and well-being of larger life-supporting systems.

Stewardship is a *mental model*: an orientation held toward work and life. It assumes care for the integrity of social life that includes working to ensure dignity, health, mutual accountability, and fair opportunities (including access, development, and rewards). In doing so, lives are nourished in ways that support our resilience and sustainability within the broader world. *Stewardship* is a basic life orientation, and *sustainability* is its goal. In adopting this mental model in my coaching, I've noticed shifts in the ways I observe, listen, and engage in inquiry with leaders. I now see any aspect of coaching as an element or factor in the leader's overall sustainability—as a person, leader, and organizational contributor.

Common sense and self-interest call us to care for what matters and is meaningful in life, and more and more we're seeing how global factors affect local conditions (the human and financial costs of war, terrorism, energy prices, pollution, global warming, etc.). When we, as coaches and leaders, connect the local and global, the part and the whole, then our self-interest matures into an enlightened self-interest, bringing us into conversations that are bigger than the personal and organizational. Grasping the interconnectedness of humans worldwide and the open-loop systems of nations and nature, we can engage in the conversations and challenges of our time.

Since the late 1990s, books such as *A Roadmap for Natural Capitalism* (Hawkins, Lovins, and Lovins), *The Natural Step for Business* (Natrass and Altomare), *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature* (Benyus), *Green to Gold: How Smart Companies Use Environmental Strategy to Innovate, Create Value, and Build Competitive Advantage* (Esty and Winston), and the annual editions of *State of the World* (Worldwatch Institute) have provided business and government leaders with the trends, statistics, guiding principles, and new conceptual maps needed to address the collision path between our economies and the sustainability of the natural world. These principles and maps are familiar to coaches who have studied Meg Wheatley, Peter Senge, Joe Jaworski, Fritjof Capra, E. O. Wilson, and Elisabet Sahtouris. Holistic systems thinkers address the broader context of organizational life and leadership, drawing from insights embedded in nature and articulated through chaos and complexity theories.¹

Just as coaches are evolving toward a more holistic approach, leaders too have moved beyond bottom-line considerations and command and control leadership. Many well-known corporate leaders are stepping forward in the absence of political leadership and assuming stewardship responsibilities that go well beyond compliance with regulations and environmental law. Scores of major companies, including Nike, 3M, GE, Starbucks, and DuPont have moved to double or triple bottom-line (financial, social, and environmental) integrated strategies. They see their enlightened self-interest in care that goes beyond

maximizing quarterly shareholder returns.² Today, given what we've been seeing in terms of global warming and environmental tipping points, it seems essential that we add another integral element—the environment—that is the context within which life, work, and culture take place. In coaching and leading, stewardship is an active holistic application of care and love for the value of our inheritance and continued contributions as we pass it along to future generations through the ways we choose to work and live in nature.

In coaching, the following four interdependent dimensions of stewardship can be explored with leaders:

- Care for one's self
- Care for others
- Care for work
- Care for nature

Taken together, these four stewardship relationships (figure 22.1) comprise a basic infrastructure of life, offering a simple yet robust lens for holistic coaching.

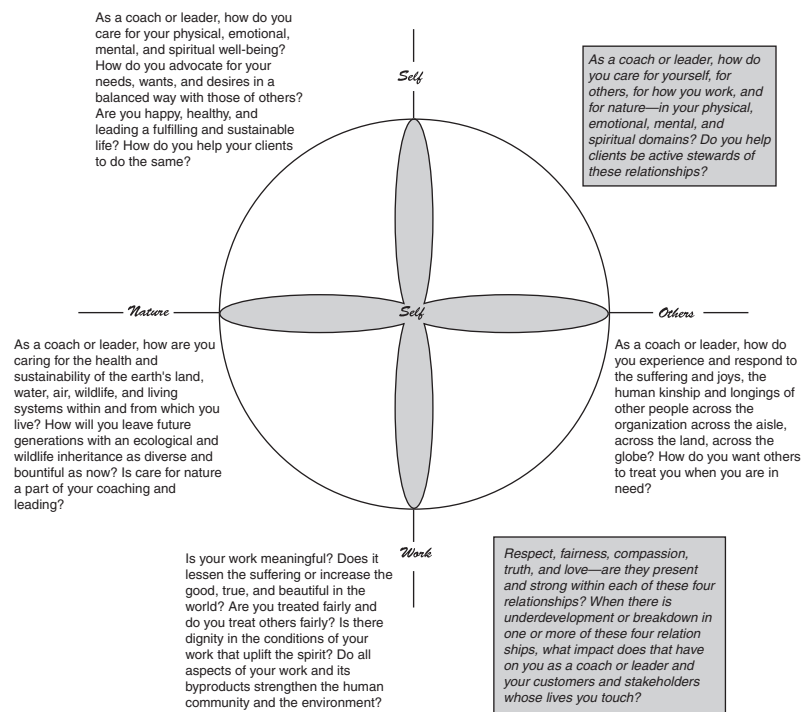


Figure 22.1 Four stewardship relationships

Source: © Lloyd Raines, 2004+

CARE FOR THE SELF

In the first few sessions of coaching a new leader, I'm eager to learn about her relationship with herself. Leaders, by and large, are hard drivers—of themselves and others. They tend to work long hours, put the organization first, and overlook some basic awareness regarding self-care. For me, coaching from a holistic perspective begins with addressing the presenting issues while listening and observing in other dimensions to discern connections (and disconnections) in the leader's self-awareness and self-care. This is a process of raising the leader's awareness about what matters—from the inside out, around the individual's personal and professional effectiveness, health, and well-being. And, in turn, I'm probing how this person's behaviors impact the effectiveness, health, and well-being of others.

Whatever is being expressed through a leader's language, body, emotions, and spirit is a window through which I begin to learn about his or her world. Being in the interior of many leaders' worlds is a chance to notice similarities. After a while, I've seen a kind of universality, with leaders having roughly similar needs, wants, desires, and challenges in common as well as with their stakeholders. What leaders (and people) seem to have in common outweighs their differences. This is comforting. Sometimes I see this commonality when leaders are in crisis mode or when they are in a period of relative stasis. There are many similarities in the look and feel of angst and calm from one leader to the next. A kind of simplicity and complexity are present in each conversation with fresh puzzles awaiting exploration and discovery.

For many leaders, their overall health is not a concern until it becomes so. In my initial sessions with new clients I do a comprehensive assessment of their self-care and ask questions such as the following: When is the last time you had a full physical check-up? What is your diet like? How much sleep are you getting? On average, how many hours a week are you putting in at work or on work? How are your caffeine, sugar, and alcohol intake? What is your exercise regimen? What time of the day are you most alert and do you do your best work? How is your general state of mind? How would you describe your mental health? What mood do you find you are in most often? What emotions seem to be the most challenging for you to handle? Are you finding a deeper sense of meaning in your work?

Initially, leaders are caught off-guard by some of these questions, yet soon they begin to see the obvious connections between their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and their overall leadership fitness. They see where their self-care (or lack thereof) either

adds or drains energy from their *being*, affecting in turn their capacity for *doing* the work of leadership. Each question draws their awareness and focus to the *ecology* of their energy—where and when their energy is high and low, stable and frazzled. By paying attention to what affects their energy, leaders are able to be more intentional in building their overall resilience and sustainability.

Asking questions that evoke reflection on the connections between body, emotions, mind, spirit, and social relationships, leaders can experiment with self-observations or behavioral practices that bring about slight or significant shifts in their awareness and self-care. Those shifts can have immediate benefits for their health and well-being, including enhanced emotional resilience for difficult, tense situations at work and at home. If exploring connections and disconnections stopped at the personal level, however, it would be an inadequate picture of the leader's reality.

A leader's self-care also includes the well being of her or his important relationships—the ones that nurture her health and stability in her private and professional spheres. Care for oneself shares a permeable boundary with care for others. Reciprocity and mutuality in our relationships help balance and make life meaningful, cultivate empathy and compassion, and transform transactional life into intimate life. This sense of mutual accountability is positive and generative and not a burden.

Our personal integration and development as human beings does not occur in social isolation. Self-realization without social realization warps the ego, making it difficult to manage and self-correct one's weaknesses and personality shadows. The brilliant contributor who lacks empathy or is unable to listen to or collaborate with others is not likely to remain sustainable over time in an organization, or if he or she does, others will be forced to leave in his or her wake.

CARE FOR OTHERS

Beyond the leader's care for family and friends are the relationships with her or his organization's employees and stakeholders—those internally and externally affected by the leader's and organization's behaviors (including actions and inactions).

To gain insights into leaders thinking regarding *care for others*, I might ask them questions like these: How are you regularly inviting the ideas and feedback of people throughout the organization? How are you making decisions that respect the dignity, health, well-being, desire for inclusion, and capacity for contributions from not just those

with influence but also the less visible, less powerful stakeholders? What are the ways you reach out and strategically build trust and confidence with internal and external stakeholders? How does your organization reflect the broader demographics of the population and how does it benefit (or not) from diverse representation in the leadership ranks and throughout the organization? What recruitment, development, and reward policies reinforce a diverse workforce? How does your organization help develop and give voice to leaders at all levels? What do you do to regularly, informally solicit feedback from a wide range of stakeholders to learn how to improve as a leader? How do you make it safe for employees to speak truthfully and easily to those in positions of power?

To assess the effectiveness of a leader's social relationships I conduct half-hour interviews with five to ten key stakeholders to gather anecdotes and data to help me understand current perceptions about the leader's strengths, midrange abilities, and areas in need of development. In addition to any questions the leader may want me to ask, I pose two other questions: What is Laura currently doing well as a leader that you would like to acknowledge and reinforce? And what could Laura be doing more of, less of, or differently to be even more effective as a leader? These questions have a positive, safe, and generative tone and mindset. It is easier for a stakeholder to suggest a few things Laura could do more of or less of than it is to say what Laura is doing wrong.

To explore a leader's mindset around care for others, I ask: What differences, if any, are there in the ways you approach conversations with each stakeholder group? What assumptions do you make about your power and authority and how you think about and interact with external customers, supervisors, peers, direct reports, and other support personnel? How do you express care for others interpersonally, in team meetings, in larger organizational settings, in decision-making practices, and other areas of organizational life?

When leaders are good stewards of their *internal* ecologies (mind, body, emotions, and spirit) and their social relationships, they are more likely to be experienced as centered, trustworthy, humble, curious, confident, and nonjudgmental. These simple elements of congruence and social connection express a kind of leadership *presence* that attracts the confidence, commitment, and loyalty of others.

When leaders are good stewards of their *external* ecologies, they model leadership presence on a larger stage with broader impact. There are many conscientious socially attuned leaders we can look to as models. Industry leaders at Patagonia, The Body Shop, and UPS

have strategically integrated sustainability and social well-being into their core principles, values, and goals. They conduct their businesses with care for the quality of human life (locally and globally), for the environment, and for profits. Their employees know their daily work contributes to a better world and it inspires them. These are high performance organizations with high morale, low turnover, and superior customer service.³ Moving from being a steward for healthy profits alone to a steward for people, planet, and profits is complex for leaders and their organizations and requires a redesign of a company's vision, identity, systems, knowledge integration, practices, relationships, and culture.

We affect each other; our actions and inactions are contagious. Permeable boundaries absorb *from* and emit influences *into* our shared domains of life. The flux and flow of life, leadership, and coaching are alive in a jitterbug of polarities between creation and destruction, emergence and dissipation, stability and change, certainty and ambiguity, abundance and scarcity, courage and timidity, love and fear. That dynamism is also reflected in the evolution of the stories we live—how we react to life and fashion the story of who we are as individuals (as nations and as a world community), how we relate to and work with others, the substance of our contributions in our communities, the mood we absorb and feed into our subcultures and into the broader mainstream culture.

CARE FOR NATURE

Individual leadership behaviors are nested in and influenced by many other factors. Every dimension of a leader's world is informed by many systems and ecologies: culture, politics, economics, geography, location, contemporary mindset, family, health, emotions, spirit, set of social relationships, generation, gender, nationality, and so on. As obvious as it seems, all of these ecologies are ultimately dependent on the health and well-being of nature's ecological systems (air, water, land, resources, critters large and small, and biosphere) and the stabilities or instabilities of weather and climate. Like our health, nature's primacy is invisible until some basic condition that had previously been taken for granted is no longer stable. Consider the impact and social and financial costs associated with increasing rates and severity of violent storms, droughts, floods, and heat waves. Our survival and well-being are directly, inextricably tied to nature and our care or abuse of nature and the biosphere. To the degree that we act with an impoverished sense of stewardship, instabilities in climate will in turn wipe out

homes and infrastructure and impoverish us in real terms. Our health and nature's health are bound up with each other. Humans are sustainable only if nature is healthy, stable, and sustainable.

Since the early 1970s and the advent of the environmental movement, early adopter companies like those mentioned earlier have been designing green (environmentally sustainable) organizations. The coaching profession is gradually expanding beyond its holistic focus on the individual to include a broader whole systems view, seeing care for nature as naturally integrated into leadership coaching—and with good reason. We have never been so aware of the intimate connection between the state of our environment and our individual and social well-being.

As coaches and citizens we have long been aware of trends regarding global warming, the deterioration of the environment, and pollution as well as the gap between the rich and poor and the persistence of poverty and homelessness. Yet, for the most part, we have seemed not to know what to do with that information or how to incorporate it into our work. These pressing moral and professional challenges are often alien to our job descriptions, workplace concerns, and our coaching conversations. Our world is fragmented to the point that we see these problems as externalities to our daily work and as the responsibilities of others: government agencies, social services, nonprofits, and volunteer organizations.

At the same time, there are growing numbers of leaders in the private and public sectors developing a comprehensive green approach in their organizations. They have found ways to tap into the natural symbiosis of financial, social, and environmental drivers and have seen that it is in their long-term self-interest to go beyond the single bottom line to a triple bottom line commitment. Well-known companies such as 3M, Unilever, Shell, Proctor & Gamble, and a growing number of others have designed for synergy and discovered ways to combine the best for people, prosperity, and the planet.⁴ As one example, the US Environmental Protection Agency created the “3P” focus—people, prosperity, and planet—to spur an integrated strategic approach to conversations in government agencies.⁵

As leadership coaches, we also have a choice to stretch our professional awareness to what is going on around us and actively partnering with that evolving story. This is the great challenge of our era: the alignment of human activities to be in harmony with the natural world and social care for those who are vulnerable, dispossessed, and unable to enjoy the blessings of democratic life.

Leadership coaches and leaders are able to stretch and even transform their mindset and worldviews, and the range of expressions and

connections they look and listen for. It is one of the primary reasons we as coaches engage in learning and developmental activities. We attend conferences, take additional coursework, write articles, engage in learning communities or communities of practice, and other methods of continuous learning. Our awareness and action can tend toward being relatively small and self-interested or large and in service to the global well-being. Where once coaching was primarily focused on linguistics, psychology, and performance behaviors, it now has an expanded perspective that includes domains such as the emotions, somatics, care for the environment, and care for stakeholders near and far. And, of course, coaching and leadership are continuing to evolve. Just as the shift to a green perspective in the business world continues, bringing sustainability conversations into the business mainstream, something similar may happen with leadership coaching. And with that progression, a worldview that was broken into fragments by the scientific and industrial revolutions may regain its wholeness in an integrated, socially focused cosmology.

CARE FOR WORK

We live and work in global interdependence—dressing in clothes made in China, Pakistan, the Philippines; eating fruits and drinking coffee imported from South America; driving to work in our internationally made cars with foreign oil and gas. Once there, we power up our computers made with parts produced worldwide, and “google” into the global brain for information in an instant. Since we anchor ourselves in the social world through work and the sharing of products and services produced worldwide, we are in a global network of relationships. To the degree we choose to be conscious of those relationships and interdependencies, we awaken to a fundamental dimension of stewardship. We engage in commerce and civil relations with others as partners for mutual benefit instead of some exploiting others for gain.

When coaches and leaders are attentive stewards at work, we reinforce values of dignity, meaning, and community while also benefiting prosperity and the planet. Stewardship values inform and guide leaders throughout an organization in strategically using and deploying the organization’s resources. A holistic approach to coaching leaders is curious about leaders’ sense of fulfillment, dignity, health, and well-being in relation to the work they do as well as the effect of their decisions and organizational policies on others and the planet as a whole.

For leaders, coaches can press them with direct questions such as these that go to core values: In the face of the challenges of the day,

how does your work and your organization's vision and stance in the world bring meaning and honor to your contributions? In what ways does your work inspire you? How do you feel that your work is making a difference in the quality of life for other people in the world?

Leaders can be attuned with themselves, with others, and with nature—yet, if they are not also attuned with the work they are doing they will not likely be living to their full potential. Because leaders (like people anywhere) are designed for continual growth, work that once was engaging and fully satisfying may be less so after three or four years. Old questions need new answers as leaders continue to scan the horizon of their own lives and of the larger world around them for motivation, meaning, and creativity. It is common for leaders reaching their professional high-water marks to look for opportunities in which they really believe. Holistic coaching probes a leader's opportunities for introducing into his or her current leadership work and into his or her organization new ideas, principles, and values that could make a difference in the meaningfulness of the work *right now*.

Here's an example of how holistic leadership transformation can happen. At Interface, a billion-dollar global company, CEO Ray Anderson read Paul Hawken's book, *The Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability*, and had an epiphany. Virtually overnight he became convinced that his company's way of working and producing carpet and office supplies had to change. He committed to transforming Interface from oil-based carpet production into completely natural, recyclable carpets. Further, he engaged his entire company of employees in an education around sustainability that was far beyond what was currently going on in almost any other company.⁶ When Anderson and his employees committed to sustainability goals together, they captured a kind of "lightning in a bottle." Employees are excited about what they do because they know they're working for a better world every day, and this inspires them. Leaders who capture a vision that inspires the dedication of their workforce garner the advantage of intrinsic employee motivation along with tapping their collective intelligence. The concepts of stewardship and sustainability have the potential to engage deeper levels of commitment, innovation, meaning, and productivity at all levels of organizational life.

When coaches are aware of these innovative movements in marketplace and leadership development, coaching conversations can explore more expansive possibilities. By probing, inquiring, and provoking new ways of observing what's possible or by introducing an article or book at the right moment, coaches can help fundamentally shift a leader's core mental model.

HOLISTIC COACHING AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

For leaders, leadership coaching is an invitation for *growth by design*. In the ways we as coaches hold nonjudgmental safe space, listen, inquire, challenge, and trust, we enable leaders to coax from themselves their human potential, wisdom, and courage, and in turn help them understand how to cultivate that in others.

Like any profession, coaching is constantly evolving and growing in ways to awaken more breadth and depth in us and in leaders to act responsibly through our actions with a growing moral sensibility. This process moves developmentally toward greater integration, in moral and spiritual terms through stages. In my coaching conversations with leaders, I initially use a three-stage model developed by Carol Gilligan that clients find easily accessible and useful.⁷

At the first moral stage (preconventional), we encounter behavior that is *self-interested and selfish*. This stage “looks out for Number One,” with little concern for what this means for others. “I am the center of the universe, and I act accordingly.”

The second moral stage (conventional) encounters behavior that expresses *care*. When my circle of concern expands, I see my self-interest as being directly tied up with the self-interests of others in my close-in tribes (based on some particular likeness, belief, or affiliation). “We’re in this together—what helps you helps me. The group can count on me and I can count on the group for support.” A tribe has an insular feel, with members identifying closely with other tribal members, and not with those of other tribes. It has both internal cohesion and a sense of insiders and outsiders, the chosen and the not chosen.

At the third moral stage (postconventional), we experience interconnections with people everywhere and with nature and its myriad life forms. This level is expressed by behaviors that spring from a sense of *universal or global care*. At this level, the entire global community and ecology are seen in an “I-Thou” relationship. “I’m part of everything and everyone and it all is an integral part of me.” This stage acknowledges and behaves as if people anywhere are part of one tribe, inseparable, experiencing the joys and suffering of others as akin to their own. “I hold reverence for and an active stewardship with the ecological commons and the global human community.”

Once I’ve introduced Gilligan’s basic developmental distinctions to a leader, it is easy to introduce and contextualize other readings on moral and leadership developmental stages. I have found Joiner and Joseph’s book, *Leadership Agility*, to be an accessible, effective framework for leaders to assess their current stage and undertake

ongoing conscious development through the authors' framework and taxonomy. Coaches using stages as a framework for self-understanding learn where they have come from, where they are, and what their next areas of development are. When they use it with other leaders, those leaders benefit from insights into their mindset and how that mindset affects their view of leadership, power, possibilities, and social interactions.

BEARING WITNESS

When coaching, the concept of *bearing witness* entails holding active awareness of the current conditions of joy and sorrow, well-being and suffering, of stakeholders near and far. I can bear witness to the pain, confusion, and suffering as well as the joy, love, and satisfaction of the leader I'm with. At the same time I can bear witness to what I know is going on in the daily lives of people in other parts of the organization and the world, and at an appropriate moment I can introduce that broader awareness to the leader in front of me. And at other moments, I may bear witness to the impact of business actions (or inactions) on employees, the environment, on suppliers or the environment upstream or on consumers and nature downstream.

As leadership coaches, our professional obligations require us to be in continuous personal and professional development. With disciplined, active engagement in any dimension of development (somatic, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, social, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, etc.), we expand the subtlety of the sensibilities that inform and shape our mindset and worldview. From that place of development we listen with more complexity and openness, make distinctions, ask questions, and offer provocations for leaders. In broad terms, then, we coach and bear witness from predominantly one of three levels. We may coach and bear witness from a level that begins and ends with a focus on the leader's individual *self-interest* (and, perhaps, the coach's self-interest, as well). Or we may coach and bear witness from a perspective of *care* for the leader and the organization's stakeholders. Or we may coach and bear witness from a perspective of *global care* for the health and well-being of the global community.

What a holistic framework provides for leadership coaches and leadership coaching is a way to see the actual wholeness of the playing field we enter every time we engage in coaching relationships. By developing a framework that sees the leader within a much broader context, we can be more attentive, careful, and caring about what we listen for and inquire about with leaders. It enables us to have a balanced

awareness and approach to supporting the broadest and deepest personal flourishing of leaders in service to the responsibilities and opportunities that accompany their position and ours.

NOTES

1. The books, authors, and thinkers referenced in this paragraph are listed, along with some of their seminal works, in the bibliography.
2. Esty and Winston, *Green to Gold*, 7–29.
3. Anderson, *Mid-Course Correction*, 149–181.
4. See note 2 above, 25, 126, 150–156, 229–233, 314.
5. US Environmental Protection Agency, “P3: People, Prosperity, and the Planet Student Design Competition for Sustainability,” http://es.epa.gov/ncer/p3/fact_sheet.html (accessed November 13, 2007).
6. See note 4 above, 43–61, 139–181.
7. K. Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 45–208.

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