

Leading From the Top—

How Conscious Evolution Can Change Your Life

by Marta Wilson, PhD

Today, we have reached explosive levels of freedom. For the first time in history, we are actively managing our own mutation. In fact, it is now up to us to decide what it means to be a successful human being. Leading our evolution has become the philosophical task of our age.¹ What is evolution? Evolution is change, change in a particular direction. And, we can consciously create change to transform ourselves and our environment. We have all lived or heard of personal transformation stories. To illustrate, one person's story of conscious change goes like this:

“At age 23 I was one of the unhappiest young men in New York. I was selling motor trucks for a living. I didn't know what made a motor truck run. That wasn't all: I didn't want to know. I despised my job. I despised living in a cheap furnished room on West 56th Street--a room infested with cockroaches. I still remember that I had a bunch of neckties hanging on the walls, and when I reached out every morning to get a fresh necktie, the cockroaches scattered in all directions. I despised having to eat in cheap, dirty restaurants.

I came home to my lonely room each night with a sick headache--a headache bred and fed by disappointment, worry, bitterness, and rebellion. I was rebelling because the dreams I had nourished back in my college days had turned into nightmares. Was this life? Was this the vital adventure I had anticipated so eagerly? Was this all life would ever mean to me---working at a job I despised and with no hope for the future? I longed for leisure to read. I longed to write the books I had dreamed of writing back in my college days.

I knew I had everything to gain and nothing to lose by giving up the job I despised. I wasn't interested in making a lot of money, but I was interested in making a lot of living. In short, I had come to the Rubicon---to that moment of decision which faces most people when they set out in life. So I made my decision, and that decision completely altered my future. It has made the rest of my life happy and rewarding beyond my most utopian aspiration. My decision was this: I would give up the work I loathed, and would make my living

teaching adult classes in night schools. Then I would have my days free to read books, prepare lectures, and write. I wanted to live to write and write to live.” -- Dale Carnegie

Dale Carnegie's success as a teacher, businessman, and writer of human relations books has made him an inspiration to people around the world.² He achieved all that by setting goals, adjusting them as circumstances required, and never losing sight of where he was headed next. Mr. Carnegie demonstrated conscious evolution in action.

The Top of Your Mountain

If you are not aware of the fact that you are a suitable candidate for leadership, today is the day to know it's true. We all lead by example every single day. We model wrong, right, bad, good, apathy, excitement, hate and love. Everyone in our personal and professional lives takes note and is affected by every thought we think, every word we speak, and every deed we do... every thought, word, and deed. The challenge is to find clarity, perspective, and altitude using competence and authenticity.

Where is the Top? | Leading from the top is like standing on a mountain. From the summit, we have clarity, we have perspective, and we have altitude. Each of us can plant a flag on our mountain. How you define your mountain is up to you. When you are at the top, though, you know it. For you, the top might be a challenging job, riding the crest of a tremendous wave, or teaching your child the ABCs. Experiences like these focus our whole being in a rush of energy and lift us out of the anxieties and boredom of everyday life. The sailor feels at one with the boat, the wind, and the sea; the singer feels a sense of universal harmony. In these moments, the awareness of time disappears, and hours flash by without our noticing. That is the top.⁴ So, where is the top? The top is where you find true joy.

Who is a Leader? | Grace Hopper, a management expert and the first female admiral in the U.S. Navy, observed

the difference between management and leadership as one of action. She noticed that managers work with processes, models, and systems. In addition to those things, she realized that leaders must work with people and their emotions.³ Eliciting the cooperation of others, listening well, and placing the needs of others above your own needs are qualities that you can choose to make your own. Everyone has leadership potential. You either choose to exercise it or you do not.

Think of leadership as the sum of competence and authenticity. The problem is, when we are stuck, we are not likely to make progress by using competence as our tool. Instead, progress requires authenticity and commitment to two things. First, we need to understand ourselves better. Second, we need to change our habits—how we think, what we value, how we work, how we connect with people, how we manage frustration, how we learn, and what we expect from life. Changing those habits means changing our way of being intelligent. So, who is a leader? You are a leader, if you choose to be.

The Truth About Evolution

A Whirlpool of Surprises | We exist in a whirlpool of cultural evolution that is full of surprises. Who could have predicted that Dell Computer, a company started by an undergraduate at the University of TX, would outperform the world's most powerful technology companies? Who would have guessed that America Online, ridiculed as a destination for “newbies,” would acquire the world's best-known media company? These are examples of folks who are generating ideas that challenge the dogma of their industry. There are cultural heretics all around us who are changing government, technology, private industry, education, defense...you name it. They are choosing to consciously change the world in which we live.

An Investment in Knowledge | Our future relies on conscious evolution of knowledge. Look at Alfred Mann who was bowled over in 1999 when the House Ear Institute bestowed its highest award on him. Alfred Mann developed an ear implant that restores hearing for deaf people. For him, the high point of the evening was not the speeches. It was the four-year-old girl who handed him the award. She had once been deaf. She came onto the stage and said, “Thank you, Mr. Mann, for my implant.” With tears in his eyes, he recently recalled, “It was the most moving thing you can ever imagine.” So what is Alfred Mann doing to celebrate? He is investing in the evolution of knowledge. He has already given \$100 million each to his alma mater schools, and he is going to give a total of \$500 million more to leading universities over the next several years. Alfred Mann is investing in the evolution of knowledge.⁵

An Illusion of Torture | Just like Alfred Mann, we can be conscious contributors to our unfolding future. But, be

warned, a Canadian neurosurgeon has made some dramatic discoveries about the human mind's reaction to evolution. Various experiments proved that when a person is forced to change a fundamental belief or opinion, the brain's nervous sensations look like the person is experiencing torture! But evolution is not something to fear. It is something we can welcome. Without change, nothing would ever grow or blossom, and we would never move forward to become the people we want to be. The joy of conscious change far outweighs the, sometimes, torturous transition. It's funny, the toughest thing to change is our mind. We can expect change; it is inevitable. Our choice is to decide whether to be conscious about it or not.⁶

An Experiment for You

If you would, in the space provided below, write down the year you were born. Then, list three things that have come into existence since then. For example, since 1963, people born in that year have seen personal computers, cell phones, and air bags for cars all come into being.

The Year I Was Born _____ and Three Things That Have Come Into Being Since Then

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

These are just a few indicators of how our culture, our country, our communities, and we as individuals are evolving every day. How does consciousness fit with this evolution?

The Choice of Consciousness

Consciousness is defined as awareness, awakens, and alertness! We have arrived at a unique moment in history where being conscious is critical. We are at the intersection of an unprecedented abundance of capital and an explosion of ideas. As we prepare to live a new century, how do we stay in a continual and choiceful state of awareness, awakens, and alertness to our state of evolution?

Most people are conscious about what they do not want. The trick is to get conscious about what you DO want. Leading from the top hinges on the clarity of what you want for your self, your relationships, and your organization. This is a three-legged stool that will fall if any leg is weak. What do you want for yourself? Your relationships? Your organization? Take a moment and write your initial thoughts in the space provided here.

What I Want For

My Self _____

My Relationships _____

My Organization _____

Our ability to lead with altitude hinges on the clarity of our answers to these three questions. Do not be surprised if you had difficulty answering them. Many people do, even people on the fast track. As evidence, Fortune Magazine recently conducted a study of executives to determine why CEOs fail.⁷ The study revealed that CEOs who derailed were weak in one or more of these three areas. The take-away from the article is that leaders must consciously evolve toward self, people, and enterprise mastery. Now, let's look at these three types of mastery.

Self Mastery

Self mastery is knowledge of ourselves. Self mastery is managing our internal states, our preferences, our impulses, and our goals. Below are three examples of self mastery qualities:

1. **Confidence** - a strong sense of self-worth
2. **Adaptability** - flexibility in handling change
3. **Initiative** – proactively seizing opportunities

Self mastery is necessary for conscious evolution. But, it is not enough. More is required. The second requirement is people mastery.

People Mastery

People mastery is the ability to create and sustain purposeful, meaningful relationships. People mastery includes awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns. Listed are three examples of people mastery qualities:

1. **Vulnerability** – complete and total openness
2. **Building bonds** - establishing and nurturing interpersonal relationships
3. **Service orientation** - anticipating, recognizing, and meeting the needs of others

Together, personal and people mastery make up emotional intelligence, the highest single predictor of star performance in today's work force.⁸ But, even emotional intelligence is not enough. The third requirement is enterprise mastery.

Enterprise Mastery

There are two definitions of enterprise. One is “a business organization”, and the second is “readiness for daring action.” Honestly, in these times of rapid change, it is difficult

to see one existing without the other. Enterprise mastery is knowledge of how our organization works and how to improve it. Following are three qualities of enterprise mastery:

1. **Customer and Employee Focus** – building culture, service, motivation, learning, and communication to maximize stakeholder satisfaction
2. **Process and Product Innovation** – leveraging quality, change mechanisms, infrastructure, planning, and technology to optimize organizational performance
3. **Financial Framework** – understanding the flow of money in one's organization and balancing it with a family of customer, employee, process, and innovation measures

Regarding items 1 and 2 above, an organization cannot succeed if it is consumer-led, because in a world full of so much constant change, consumers cannot anticipate the next big thing. The advice? Organizations should be consumer-informed and idea-led. This is a marriage of 1) customer and employee focus with 2) process and product innovation.⁹ And as far as financials go, how does your organization make money, receive money, manage money, and invest money to achieve its mission? If you are not sure, make a point to learn more about it as well as other key performance areas.

Balanced Leadership

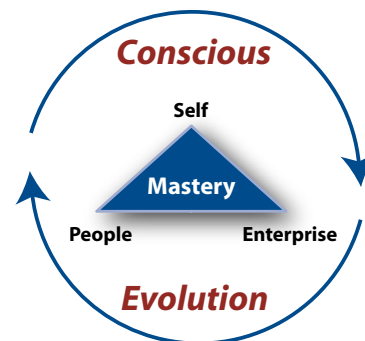


Figure 1: Balanced Leadership

Leading from the top takes continuous work, discipline, and balance. As portrayed above in Figure 1, balanced leadership is simultaneous and conscious evolution toward self, people, and enterprise mastery. Conscious leaders integrate these three areas so that one does not get too far ahead or too far behind the other two. In the end, the key to leading our own evolution is the willingness to openly receive knowledge and then freely give it to other people. Remember, we are all suitable candidates for leadership and deserving of the joy it can bring to us and others.

Summary

- Evolution is change in a particular direction.
- Consciousness is aliveness, awakeness, and alertness.
- We can be conscious contributors to our unfolding future.
- Self mastery is knowledge of ourselves.
- People mastery is knowledge of our relationships.
- Enterprise mastery is knowledge of our organizations.
- Balanced leadership is simultaneous and conscious evolution toward self, people, and enterprise mastery.

Tools You Can Use

On the right you will find The Balanced Leadership Quiz. Use it to test your Leadership IQ. The purpose of this tool is to heighten your consciousness about areas that you might want to improve. After conducting a self-assessment using this instrument, we urge you to seize all opportunities that come your way to learn, grow, and expand your tremendous leadership potential.

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BALANCED LEADERSHIP QUIZ

Each of the following items is an important leadership quality. To rate your Leadership IQ, look at the list and ask yourself, "On a scale of 1-10, how would I rate my mastery of this quality?"

Self Mastery

- ___ my emotional awareness
- ___ my self confidence
- ___ my self control
- ___ my trustworthiness
- ___ my conscientiousness
- ___ my adaptability
- ___ my innovative ability
- ___ my achievement drive
- ___ my judgment
- ___ my initiative
- ___ my optimism
- ___ my knowledge of my strengths

Self Mastery Score _____

People Mastery

- ___ my ability to build relationships
- ___ my understanding of others
- ___ my ability to initiate change
- ___ my service orientation
- ___ my ability to leverage diversity
- ___ my political awareness
- ___ my ability to develop people
- ___ my influence over others
- ___ my ability to manage conflict
- ___ my communication skills
- ___ my ability to motivate a team
- ___ my collaboration and cooperation skills

People Mastery Score _____

Enterprise Mastery

- ___ my ability to create a culture conducive to learning
- ___ my knowledge of strategic planning / vision realization
- ___ my ability to create a structure that facilitates efficiency
- ___ my knowledge of rewards and recognition systems
- ___ my ability to change (not just run) the organization
- ___ my knowledge of changing technologies
- ___ my knowledge of communication systems

- ___ my knowledge of whether my organization is performing at full potential
- ___ my understanding of the value exchange between my organization and its customers
- ___ my understanding of how my company makes / receives money today and in the future
- ___ my understanding of why customers seek to be in relationship with my business
- ___ my knowledge of my organization's key results areas and how to use a balanced system of measures

Enterprise Mastery Score _____

If you scored 60 or more points in each category (for a total of 180 or more), you are probably already known as a leader. If you scored at least 40 points in each category, you have promising leadership potential. If you scored less than 30 points in each category, you likely have some work to do on your leadership intelligence skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Marta Wilson founded TSI and now leads the dynamic group of PhDs and possibility thinkers whose expertise guides executives to achieve bold enterprise transformation goals. Dr. Wilson represents TSI in the industry and regional community as part of business development in the organization. A Board Member of the Northern Virginia Technology Council, Dr. Wilson is active in multiple professional organizations. She holds a PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Virginia Tech and specializes in leadership effectiveness. Dr. Wilson created and steers TSI's Feed to Lead Program, which nourishes the body, mind and spirit by supporting leadership potential in local youth. A prolific writer, she has written leadership articles and books, including *The Transformation Desktop Guide*, *Live A Difference*, and, most recently, *Leaders in Motion: Winning the Race for Organizational Health, Wealth and Creative Power*.

Contact Us:

Transformation Systems, Inc.
2011 Crystal Drive Ste 400
Arlington, VA 22202
www.transformationsystems.com

Questions for Marta?

703.682.6853

info@transformationsystems.com

