

10

The Eighth Practice – Nurture Integrity

‘I’m using the House [of Commons] as a kind of club/ringside seat/status enhancer, not as a central mission.’

Alan Clark, *The Diaries*

Throughout this book we have seen how values can either assist or inhibit learning. As with the other drivers in learning, such as goals, psychological comfort and self esteem, the role played by values appears to be double edged. On some occasions they can help generate deep learning, whilst at other times they can be sources of blind spots.

Values can assist learning when they prompt us to undertake new challenges. The diarists showed us that when their values were challenged, many of them entered a dissonant learning state, which led them to question fundamental aspects of their lives and careers. Some of the diarists decided to embark on a process of radical change (e.g. leaving their organizations) rather than tolerate beliefs and practices that they felt were wrong. Others decided to take action to protect long-cherished values and ways of working. In all of these cases, people stepped outside their comfort zones and expanded their living knowledge in order to protect deeply held beliefs and values. However, not everyone responded in this way. Some people were content to pursue their needs for comfort and security, despite the fact that in doing so, they did not feel they were acting in accordance with their ‘values’. This led to a certain degree of dissonance, but the dissonance generated defensiveness, such as cynicism or victim behaviour, rather than learning.

Values also act as spurs to learning when they inspire leadership and followership. Leaders and followers who pursue visions infused with strong values can go through a period of intense learning as they fight for their values to be enacted in the world. One of the diarists, for example, described the struggle to achieve his vision as equivalent to a ‘guerilla war’. He described his job as a ‘battle for hearts and minds’, and saw himself as a ‘disciple’ who was ‘converting’ people to his way of thinking. Values can trigger a highly emotional learning state, which may be manifested in metaphors of warfare or of religious conversion. However, this type of learning state can also lead to intolerance, rigidity and a narrowness of mind. In this state of mind, it is easy to exclude alternative, diverse opinions and miss opportunities for transformative or generative learning.

Values can alert us to when we need to change our behaviour, drawing our attention to those instances when we may not have acted with complete integrity. One diarist mentions the guilt he experienced at making an older member of the team redundant:

‘my candid approach and our discussion about how he is coping with change has paid off. Relieved at this acceptance – I really didn’t think he would sign up; feel a little sense of guilt that he may not easily find a new job. Commercially will be good, he is a barrier to change, in longer term, others in the department will benefit.’

At this point the diarist is rationalizing his guilt by referring to what he sees as the benefits to the company of the individual leaving. However, he later admits:

‘I guess on reflection in an attempt to shake him into reality and get him to accept early release, I wasn’t the usual nicey-nicey, Scientific-Solutions-pretend-nothing-is-wrong kind of person. I’m sure he will thank me in the end, although he hasn’t coped well with the transition from his civil service days.’

At this point, whilst he accepts that he could have done things differently, he is not quite prepared to embrace the full consequences of his actions for the individual concerned. It takes time and further reflection for him to draw out the full learning from the incident:

‘(nowadays) I take a bit more of a people orientation and actually make sure that I’m not just asking people to do things, I’m actually paying a bit more attention to their working environment and how they feel about work and what have you.’

The diarist only learned to change his behaviour, beliefs and emotional orientation to people having had a period of time to reflect on his underlying motivations and the consequences of his actions. This involved him facing his guilt and admitting that he could have done things differently.

However, whilst guilt can generate transformatory learning, it can also provoke defensiveness and inhibit learning and change. Much depends upon how the individual handles the discomfort associated with the feelings of guilt.

It appears as if values play an important role in learning, but that role is ambiguous and uncertain. This chapter will examine the nature of values by exploring how we can use them to promote learning and integrity in three areas often characterized by blind spots:

- expanding your range of values;
- walking the talk;
- learning through your values.

Part one of the chapter will present a working definition of ‘values’. Parts two to four will examine each of the above areas in more detail. Part five will offer some conclusions and recommendations for action.

1. Values

Freshwater and Robertson in their book *Emotions and Needs*,¹ list some basic human *needs*:

¹ Freshwater, D. and Robertson, C. (2002) *Emotions and Needs*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- survival;
- love;
- security;
- respect;
- independence;
- power;
- sexuality.

Reese in his book, simply entitled *Values*,² lists some basic *values*:

- survival;
- love;
- security;
- self respect;
- individuality;
- strength;
- meaningful and meaningless sex.

This overlap between values and needs is complex. Milton Rokeach, one-time Professor of Social Psychology at Washington State University and leading figure in the field of human values, provides a useful definition of a value:

an enduring belief that a specific *mode of conduct or end-state of existence* is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.³

McClelland, on the other hand, defines *motivation* as a combination of ‘needs, drives and incentives’ that impel a person to strive for a *particular goal or end state*. Buchanan and Huczynski⁴ provide us with another definition of *motivation*:

² Reese, W. L. (2000) *Values: A Study Guide with Readings*. New York: Humanity Books.

³ Rokeach, M. (1973) *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: The Free Press, p. 5.

⁴ Buchanan, D. and Huczynski, A. (1985) *Organisational Behaviour*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

the cognitive, decision-making process through which the individual ***chooses desired outcomes*** and sets in motion the actions appropriate to their achievement. (my emphasis)

There is clearly an overlap here between our understanding of human needs, motivation and values. All express preferences for desired end-states, outcomes or goals. Values take the form of beliefs that an end-state is preferable whilst motivation has the added component that there is a will or energy that impels the individual to act in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Values are therefore more passive than motivation: we may have values that express preferences, but personally we might not choose to invest our energy striving to achieve those preferences. However, some would argue that some, at least, of our values do contain this energizing element – that if one has certain values, one is strongly motivated to act in accordance with those values. We have had glimpses of this already with the diarists. A significant number of diarists decided to change their behaviour in response to an event that triggered and challenged their values. In the following examples the diarists changed their emotional orientations, beliefs *and* behaviour in response to a challenge to their values:

*‘my initial reaction was “how,” excuse my French, “how f***ing presumptuous” . . . what they’ve done is taken what their values are . . . to being values that I might have, without bothering to actually question or ask what it was that made me tick and what I actually liked doing.’* (this diarist left the organization)

‘they’ve altered the results to suit themselves. I am disgusted . . . Quite clearly they don’t give a shit about the health and safety of their workforce. Spoke to people here about it and it appears this isn’t the first time this has happened. I have refused to work on any more of their projects. There is (to me anyway) such a thing as professional integrity.’ (this diarist moved to a different division within the organization)

‘I was just very angry, I thought “right, OK if that’s the way they want to play it I won’t be open and honest anymore” . . . but it’s not my style, it’s not my natural way of working.’ (this diarist left the organization, significantly influenced by this event)

‘I’m the only person here that ever organizes any sort of social dos, I organize things like the raft race that we get involved in, you know,

I put in a lot of effort in ways that, you know, in trying to make this place a more pleasant place to work, but because you can't put a monetary value on it and that comes back to that, they're not interested. Unless it's pound notes, forget it.' (this diarist left the organization)

'I'm not totally convinced that they're always the very best people that get to the top. You get some people who are extremely focused on their own goals and achievements, which might well not be the success, the optimum success of their business and the people within it.' (this diarist started to question senior management more and gained the confidence to express his own opinions and beliefs)

We can see from the above that the everyday conceptual understanding of 'values' often contains a mix of constructs that include:

- *A subjective need or motivator* that is good or right for me – e.g. 'teamwork is good – I prefer to work in a team, it feels right for me and there are powerful arguments that justify my personal preference'.
- *A personal ideal* that I strive to achieve because I believe it is good for me – e.g. 'I need to work on my *teamwork* in order to counter my strong preference for independence'.
- *A subjective need or personal ideal* that everyone should strive to achieve because I believe it is good and right for our social unit/organization, etc. – e.g. 'we all need to work as a *team* because teamwork is obviously a better way to work'.
- *A societal ideal* that *our* society should strive to achieve because I believe it is good and right – e.g. 'we need to increase spending on social welfare in order to promote a *fairer and more egalitarian society*'.
- *A societal ideal* that *all* societies should strive to achieve because I believe it is good and right – e.g. 'all societies need to become democracies because *democracy* is obviously the best way to organize society'.

A general definition of values that includes all of the above constructs would look as follows:

a set of personally or socially defined preferences regarding end-states and modes of conduct which inform beliefs as to what is ‘right’ and ‘good’.

However, sometimes, in order to separate out the notion of values as needs, personal ideals and societal ideals, it can be helpful to differentiate further. For example, it is common for the popular psychology and self-help literature to use the word ‘values’ when referring to a subjective need or motivator. According to this perspective, we act in accordance with our values in order to meet deep, personal needs. Values such as ‘independence’, ‘achievement’, ‘getting things done’ are expressions of personal needs and preferences, and, as such, they are part of our personality. These may be innate or may be learned as part of early socialization. In this chapter we refer to these types of values as *motivational values*.

In the philosophical, ethical and political literature, we see a greater focus on values as ideals. Ideals such as ‘justice’, ‘equality’ and ‘fairness’ are not necessarily personal needs, but are something we strive to attain and can, in fact, contradict our needs and desires. These kinds of values are often learned via socialization and derived from historically and culturally specific *systems* of norms. They tend to be encompassed within larger systems of thought, and are sometimes superseded by time and the evolution of ideas. Examples would include: ‘the divine right of kings’; ‘communism’; ‘equal rights for women’; ‘democracy’; ‘Christianity’; ‘Islam’. Alternatively, they may be expressed in more abstract terms, such as ‘freedom’; ‘equality’; ‘justice’; ‘peace’. We refer to these as *idealistic values*. Idealistic values also include personal preferences that are not innate or part of our personal motivational profile. When we strive to live up to an ideal that does not come naturally to us, we are attempting to live by an idealistic value.

Idealistic values are often the most difficult to question as to their moral ‘rightness’. Today, it is difficult to question the rightness and goodness of ‘democracy’ or ‘freedom’. Idealistic values tend to carry an aura of ultimate goodness and unquestionable, obvious ‘rightness’ about them. When I stand up for my idealistic values I feel morally justified, there is a feeling of heroism and self sacrifice. This ‘heroic’ approach derives from the philosophical, political and ethical traditions whereby values are distinguished from self interest and may be

associated with acts of self sacrifice conducted for the sake of the 'common good'. However, we often make the mistake of carrying over this sense of rightness and goodness to our motivational values. It is important to remember that our motivational values are simply personal preferences. When we act in support of our motivational values we can, in some small way, be acting out of selfishness – following our preferences at the expense of others. There is nothing 'right and good' about teamwork. It is simply a preference, at the expense of independence. There is nothing 'right and good' about achievement. It is simply a preference, possibly at the expense of teamwork or helping others. We often forget this when talking of our values, and rarely do we question whether our values are 'right'.

Of course there are often overlaps between idealistic and motivational values, and it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference, but nevertheless the distinction can be useful when exploring how values affect the learning and behaviour of leaders. This is because the actions and decisions of leaders may result from a conflict between personal goals (e.g. making profits), motivational values (e.g. being liked, expressed as 'teamwork') and idealistic values (e.g. customer service). A person with this set of goals and values might find that her motivational values make it difficult for her to negotiate with a client, as she tries to balance the goal of maximizing profits (driving her to push a hard bargain), her motivational value of being liked by her team (feeling she must not agree to taking on too much additional work from the customer) and her idealistic values of prioritizing the needs of the client (causing her to put his needs first). These clashes in goals and values can cause a lot of frustration and confusion. They can also lead to blind spots and, sometimes, when we pursue goals at the expense of our idealistic values, a perceived lack of integrity.

All of us manage these conflicts daily as we make a flow of decisions that seek to balance our self interest, our needs and the ideals we strive to live by. But the process is often managed subconsciously and, as a result, is susceptible to cognitive biases such as rationalization. For example, we may decide not to include a highly talented individual in our team. We tell ourselves that he would disrupt the dynamics and potentially destabilize the team. In fact, if we were to examine our motives more closely, we might have to acknowledge that our decision was driven by a dislike of being challenged, a need

to be in control and a determination to ensure that the ‘disruptive’ individual would not succeed in gaining power or influence in the organization. But whilst we may be able to hide these motives from ourselves, when we are in leadership positions, they can be very apparent to those around us. Unless we are honest with ourselves about some of our underlying drives and motives, we are in danger of being subject to blind spots that undermine our integrity, the effectiveness of decisions and, ultimately, our leadership. The simple process of bringing our conflicting motivations into conscious awareness can significantly address typical leadership blind spots such as intolerance, expediency and complacency.

The following three sections offer some ways in which we can do this.

2. Expanding your Range of Values

Much one-to-one coaching focuses on helping people to identify and act in accordance with their motivational values. This involves becoming aware of one’s motivational values and developing the necessary confidence to take leadership on issues that one believes in profoundly and passionately. The process often encourages a visionary learning state, as individuals construct visions rooted in their personal values and a sense of what is ‘good and right’.

However, there is another process which involves going beyond one’s natural inclinations, instincts and preferences and exploring the ‘other side’ – the truths that we ignore or exclude because they are not part of our motivational profiles and, hence, do not come to us naturally. As we develop into more and more senior roles, our motivational values can limit us. We are then called to explore the world beyond our values in order to make decisions that are more rounded and reflect the more complex world we are dealing with. This involves seeing that other people who have very different values from us also have valid preferences and ways of operating in the world. It is difficult for someone who naturally values teamwork to see the value in independence; it is sometimes difficult for someone who values ‘supporting others’, to see the value in being task-focused and tough. However, the more senior and more complex the leadership role,

the more the leader is required to appreciate values beyond his or her own preferences. Sometimes teamwork is appropriate, sometimes not; sometimes consultation is appropriate, and sometimes not. A wise leader is able to see the truth outside his or her own value set.

Paul

Paul was a gifted manager and a popular leader amongst those who reported to him. He had been promoted regularly over the past six years and had recently been offered a senior position running a large division within the international accountancy firm for which he worked. He had refused. His reason was that he did not like the politics that he observed taking place at this level.

In Paul's view, 'playing politics' was the opposite of everything he valued. People who were good at politics were deceitful, dishonest, manipulative and untrustworthy. They were flatterers and liars, and made decisions based on their own self interest rather than that of the firm or of the people who worked for it. Paul's values were centred on openness and honesty. He believed in people being promoted according to their talent rather than because they fitted into certain leadership cliques or alliances. He believed in telling things as they were rather than hiding the truth in order to help a senior partner save face. He simply was not prepared to play their game. If it came down to sacrificing his career or sacrificing his integrity, he would rather do the former.

It was clear that whilst some partners were pleased at this refusal, other partners were disappointed. Some people saw Paul as a person of great courage and integrity who could help alleviate some of the political infighting that often took place at senior levels. Other partners, however, saw Paul as politically naïve and a 'loose cannon', and were relieved that he had declined the offer.

After some coaxing from his boss, whom he respected greatly, Paul agreed to undertake some coaching with regards to the issue. During the coaching sessions he began to recognize that one of the problems with the firm was that those who disliked the politics tended not to compete aggressively for promotion. This left the way open for the more Machiavellian employees to climb the career ladder, making it inevitable that political infighting would thrive at senior levels. This had a negative impact on the firm and on the people working for it. Everybody recognized this, but did not know what to do about it.

Furthermore, there was a strong tendency for people with values around teamwork, meritocracy and professionalism to denote any behaviour that involved so-called ‘self-promotion’ as ‘politics’. These ‘meritocrats’ felt that their work should speak for itself. This was naïve. When it came to getting oneself known, it was necessary to put names to faces, to build relationships of trust with people and to build networks throughout the organization to help open doors and get things done. Politics was simply the art of getting to know people in large organizations, and building networks of trust and mutual respect.

Paul had never seen ‘politics’ in this light before and he could see the sense of it. If people like himself did not take leadership, then senior management would always be dominated by the Machiavellian and the expedient. In fact, if no-one made a stand, even the decent people who accepted promotion would have to adopt ‘political’ behaviour simply in order to survive. Moreover, he could see that his blanket disapproval of ‘politics’ also masked a discomfort he felt with the whole notion of networking and, what he called, ‘schmoozing’. Part of his dismissal of politics was a rationalization of his own preferences for remaining task-focused and his discomfort with small talk and relationship-building. He could see that he had used the idea of playing politics to justify the fact that he did not want to step outside of his comfort zone to work purely and simply on developing and improving his relationships in the firm. He had rationalized his own discomfort and made himself feel good by claiming that his avoidance was based on his integrity, rather than personal preference.

Looking at the situation in this way made Paul think again about accepting the promotion. He could see that the promotion would be a challenge and would require him to step outside his comfort zone, change his attitude and expand his range of behaviours. However, it would be for a good cause. Perhaps he could use his new-found political awareness to make a difference in some small way. He decided to accept the position. He also decided to retain his coach in order to help him develop his political awareness and relationship-building skills.

This simple example shows how we often hide behind our values in order to justify a refusal to embrace new ways of working. Paul pretended to himself that his refusal to question his exclusive emphasis on 'achievement' was, in fact, a morally justified stance that demonstrated his openness, honesty and integrity. He confused his motivational and idealistic values. What he believed was his discomfort at the lack of senior management integrity was, in fact, discomfort at the prospect of learning and coming outside of his comfort zone.

As people enter more and more complex environments, it is more and more likely that they will face dilemmas such as Paul's. It is unlikely that one's motivational values are going to be effective in all situations. Sometimes consultation will be right; sometimes a more directive style is appropriate. Sometimes teamwork is right; sometimes a more independent style works better. Sometimes a coaching and supportive style is effective; sometimes a harder, discipline-oriented style gets better results. It is important for leaders not to be imprisoned by their motivational values, but to recognize situations that require them to work in ways that, at first, may feel uncomfortable and unnatural. A leader has to learn that just because it feels uncomfortable does not mean it's wrong! Just as a golfer would not go into a tournament with only one or two clubs, nor should a leader go into a complex situation with only one management style. It may take time to develop a more broad selection of management styles, but this flexibility and range is what makes an effective leader.⁵

⁵ Goleman, D. (2000) 'Leadership That Gets Results'. *Harvard Business Review*, March–April, pp. 78–90.

3. Walking the Talk

Remember our M&S director who admitted that he was not prepared to challenge Sir Richard Greenbury:

*“We suffered years of brutalization in the boardroom,” (he) grumbled to an analyst over lunch one day. “So why stay?” asked the analyst. “Well, there is the prestige of being a director of the best loved retailer in the land,” replied the director. “There is a comfortable financial package, wonderful pension, great lunchrooms, a car and a driver, company tickets to the opera and first-class travel wherever and whenever you want it, without questions”.*⁶

This leader had sacrificed any idealistic values he might have had because he was fulfilling his motivational values so nicely. This is why leaders do not walk the talk. Because, in a classic conflict between their motivational values and their idealistic values, they, like many of us, pursue their motivational values – they do what they want rather than what they should do.

Invariably, when organizations publish sets of values, many of them are idealistic, aspirational values. Values such as openness, honesty, customer focus and continuous learning are often published on posters and in magazines as guides for action. However, when these idealistic values get in the way of motivational values and goals, they are dropped. If work/life balance involves missing an important deadline, then it will be sacrificed and staff will be asked to work late. This is regarded as being ‘realistic’ and nothing more is thought about it.

Walking the talk is about making the difficult choices to follow idealistic values, even when it may be difficult or even not in your own self interest. Walking the talk often involves making difficult choices (for example, it may involve asking staff to work late but being aware that you are contravening an important value around work/life balance and therefore taking steps to make amends – for example, offering time in lieu). It is about being conscious of the idealistic

⁶ Bevan, J. (2002) *The Rise and Fall of Marks and Spencer*. London: Profile Books Ltd.

values of the organization and putting them into practice, even when it is inconvenient or frustrating. More than anything, it is about constantly striving to live according to one's idealistic values and avoiding the traps of expediency or complacency.

Peter

Peter worked for a government department and had just been appointed to manage the unit responsible for community relations, diversity and social cohesion. Peter had entered the civil service on the graduate 'fast track', and since leaving Cambridge University he had risen rapidly through the hierarchy. This was not surprising. Peter seemed to represent the ideal fast tracker. He had come from a family who had produced a number of outstanding civil servants. He had attended a famous public school where he had received an excellent education and a good-quality, influential network. He was confident and articulate. His confidence sometimes bordered on the arrogant, but this was countered by his extroversion and wit, which made him popular with his peers and bosses.

Peter was a 'doer'. The combination of a quick mind and his unerring confidence helped him get to the bottom of an issue and decide rapidly what needed to be done. He prided himself on his decisiveness and leadership abilities. He saw his leadership style as being clear, confident, articulate and charismatic. He seemed to have that great gift of being able to combine an emphasis on the task with an ability to influence and be liked by people. He knew what to do and how to get people to do it.

It was partly as a result of his reputation for action that he had been appointed to his latest role. His boss hoped that he would be able to bring energy and determination to his new role. The department for community relations, diversity and social cohesion (or CU – community unit – for short) had a reputation for being slow to deliver. Furthermore, the people on the ground were known to 'go native', coming back to the unit as

representatives of the various factions rather than managing to bring them together to reach much needed agreements. Peter's boss, Sue, believed that Peter would be able to get to the bottom of these issues and speed up delivery, so that the department would be seen as being more productive. Sue was anxious because the community unit was beginning to be seen as the lame duck of the organization. She wanted to improve its image as well as its performance.

Peter quickly threw himself into the role, approaching it as he had many others before. He prioritized four key projects that the department was working on, and pulled resources out of other, less important areas. Within each project, he set six measurable targets and emphasized to each team the importance of accountability and delivery. He held regular team meetings with each of the project leaders to monitor progress on each target. He constantly emphasized the importance of delivery, along with the need for tangible results which could be seen by other people in the organization. The team, on the other hand, tended to stress the need for gradual progress as the only way to gain commitment and long-lasting, sustainable change. Peter saw this as prevaricating and resistance to change. He did not have time to wait for results that would only emerge after years of negotiation.

It was not long before the unit was in uproar. One project team was devastated when its project was halted just as an agreement between three organizations who represented important minority interests in the area was about to be signed. At least three members in the team had specialist backgrounds and had been allocated to projects where their specialism was not needed. One team had been in the middle of persuading an important religious group to come to the negotiating table when their funding had been halted. Project teams were insulted by the crudity of the targets that had been set, which clearly did not recognize the complexity of the issues they were dealing with. Furthermore, they distorted activity, focusing resources on areas that were relatively easy to address but which did not address the central problems. Peter soon acquired a reputation for being a typical 'fast tracker'. Fast trackers were seen as only

interested in pursuing their own careers. They were people who came into departments, set themselves easy targets, achieved them and then moved on elsewhere before the consequences of their decisions were fully apparent. They never fully engaged with the complexity of the issues, because they were neither interested in nor concerned about the issues themselves or the people affected by them. They simply wanted to please their bosses. This meant agreeing to do anything that was asked, not challenging any requests and never representing the views of the department to their bosses.

News of the disruption, anger and disappointment soon reached Sue's ears. She was surprised. Nothing like this had ever happened to Peter before. She decided to investigate further, and soon realized that a rift had taken place between Peter and his staff. Sue felt that this would be a good learning experience for Peter. She decided to have a one-to-one session with him.

During the session she asked Peter to describe the past six months and how he felt it had gone. Peter was very happy with his performance. He was on course to achieve all his targets and he felt that the department now had some tangible results to show. When asked about relations with his staff, he acknowledged that these had been difficult at times but he put this down to resistance to change. At this point, Sue decided to tell Peter how he was viewed by his staff. She described the image of the fast tracker as seen by other people in the organization. The fast tracker was only interested in himself and his career. He preferred to address symptoms rather than focus on the complexity of the issues and their causes. The fast tracker was not interested in his staff or the people directly affected by his decisions. He was only interested in power, ambition, status and career. Sue ended her description by adding:

'Peter, you are seen by your staff as being a typical fast tracker.'

Peter was appalled that he could be seen in this light by other people, including, it seemed, by his boss. This was totally unfair. He had focused on results, but only in order to help the team

perform better and, ultimately, to increase their reputation in the organization.

As the conversation continued, Peter became aware of another set of feelings – frustration, anger and also guilt. Was there an element of truth in what Sue was saying? Had he stressed short-term results at the expense of longer-term, sustainable results because it was easier and looked better on his CV? He felt embarrassed and exposed.

Sue felt some sympathy for Peter. He had been faced with a series of apparently irreconcilable dilemmas. There was no doubt that his unit interfaced with some hugely complex social and cultural systems. However, they had to perform within a target-oriented culture that was not sympathetic to the complexity and sensitivity of these types of issues. She didn't envy him the challenge he faced. They had a long discussion which included an exploration as to why Peter wanted to go into the civil service in the first place. In fact, this conversation did reveal some of Peter's idealistic values. Peter wanted to make a difference to society and felt that this was an area in which he could achieve that. He did believe that the role played by the executive was crucial, and if done well could contribute towards the overall wealth and welfare of society. On reflection, he admitted he had changed since immersing himself in work. He had allowed his desire for personal career success to dominate and had all but forgotten why he had joined the civil service. He had, without realizing it, begun to treat people as units or resources, getting frustrated when people did not agree with him or when they brought up problems. He had begun to adopt a formulaic approach to his work – thinking that he knew the answer to the problems without attempting to probe and understand them. He could see why he might be seen as someone who avoided the complex issues, which was ironic as he was intelligent and good at getting to grips with complexity.

Sue and Peter agreed an action plan. Peter needed to regain the respect of his staff and needed to listen to their concerns. There was an element of truth in what they were saying about long-term sustainable change, and Peter would have to acknowledge this

without denying the importance of improving results in the short term as well. The team would have to get together and really get to grips with the issues. Peter would call a team meeting where he would acknowledge his past failings and apologise. He would stress the need for both short-term and long-term sustainable change and would listen to and consult the team more. He would not be giving up on his determination to improve the unit's output and performance, but would be involving his people in the decisions regarding this. Most of all, Peter recognized the traps of complacency and of allowing himself to be too strongly driven by his personal motivations, desires and needs. This would take some personal discipline, but he was determined to be seen as someone with integrity, who could be trusted to handle the complex issues. Mastering this now would provide a good foundation for his leadership in the future.

Peter's story illustrates how easy it is to confuse one's ideals and one's motivations and goals. In Peter's case, there was an underlying set of idealistic values that were important to him and which could provide a 'moral compass', pointing to what was 'right' as opposed to what was simply 'good for me'. Too often we are driven by our motivational values that cause us to aim for what is 'good for me'. We smother our idealistic values, which are the source of our conscience and which tell us what we are doing is not 'right'. The Marks and Spencer director quoted at the beginning of the chapter provides a good illustration of this. Whenever there is power, wealth, status and influence, we often ignore what is right and simply do what we want, creating 'reasons' why what we want is, in fact, right and good. It takes character, self discipline and integrity to really 'walk the talk'.

4. Learning Through Our Values

Joseph Badaracco, Professor of Ethics at Harvard, writes about 'defining moments' in leadership.⁷ These are times when we are called to

⁷ Badaracco, J. L. Jr (1998) 'The Discipline of Building Character.' *Harvard Business Review*, March–April, pp. 115–124.

make a decision that involves choosing between a set of alternatives which are neither right nor wrong. In making this choice, we reveal previously hidden aspects of our personalities, both to ourselves and to others. We make a choice based upon deeply felt, personal values and, in doing so, enact those values in a way that inspires others to follow suit. When we act in this way, we help others make sense of events by defining what is ‘right’ in often messy and confusing situations. In effect, we act as beacons illuminating the path ahead for others to follow. Leaders who act in this way are generally recognized as having both courage and integrity.

Badaracco researched a cross-section of leaders and found that those who dealt most satisfactorily with these defining moments were those who recognized the need to take time out to learn through their values. We can best illustrate this through an example.

Martin

Martin had been made CEO just over two years ago. He now found himself faced with a difficult choice. One of his senior board members, Chris, was underperforming and depressing the whole company’s performance as a result. Chris had been in position for just over 18 months, and during this time his region’s results had continued to slide. Occasionally, Martin heard reports of difficulties in the region, but it was not easy to speak to people directly without undermining Chris’s position.

Having discussed the situation with a number of people, including the HR director, Martin felt that Chris had probably been overpromoted. He was beginning to feel that he should remove Chris and put him in a less exposed (and less senior) role. However, there were a number of new hires on his board, all of whom had been in place for less than two years. He sensed that if he removed someone from the board at this stage, it might undermine the confidence of the other directors, and could encourage internal rivalries to develop. He was also unsure as to whether he should be giving Chris more time to rectify the situation. It felt a bit ruthless to remove someone in

such a senior position after a relatively short period of time. Martin had spent a lot of time coaching Chris, and he had improved a lot over the past year. However, if Martin let the situation deteriorate for much longer, the company could suffer and relations with investors could be seriously damaged. What should he do?

Martin decided to take some time on retreat to think the situation through. He thought back over his career to see whether he had come across any situations like this before. Suddenly, he remembered an old boss of his from over 15 years ago. This boss, Alison, had acted as an informal mentor when Martin had achieved his first management position. Alison had a reputation for being tough but fair. She intimidated many people with her challenging style and her determination to seek out the truth. But Alison had a clear philosophy – her job was to make the tough and difficult decisions that no-one else wanted to make. On one occasion, this had involved shutting down a loss-making factory in a town that relied on the factory for much of its employment. Alison had known that this was necessary in order to steer the company onto a sound financial footing, but she had not enjoyed making the decision.

Once Alison had made the decision, however, she did everything she could to help the people affected. She had provided career guidance for many, and had partnered with the local council to provide help in retraining, job hunting and setting up small businesses. The company had provided good redundancy packages and had paid for personal financial advisors to come and speak to the people involved. Martin remembered how Alison had turned a difficult situation into one where she had earned grudging respect from many people involved. This had not been easy. Alison's methods had made the redundancies more expensive than they needed to be, and she had fought many battles inside the organization to achieve her aims. But Alison had always been motivated by the recognition that although being in business involved making tough decisions, this did not mean that those decisions could not be implemented fairly and compassionately.

Having thought this through, everything seemed a lot clearer to Martin. His primary responsibility was to the company – it was his job to look after its interests, and this meant it was his job to make tough and difficult decisions. That was what he was paid for and he could not, in conscience, avoid those decisions. He knew that Chris had to go. Even as he made this decision he felt a sense of relief, a sense of certainty that this *was* the right decision.

However, he would do everything in his power to ensure that Chris was handled fairly and compassionately. He wanted to help Chris and to ensure that he left with as positive an outlook as was possible. He also wanted others to recognize that the decision was based on a sensible analysis of the facts and not a knee jerk response to difficulties. Martin decided to contact HR as soon as he returned to the office to discuss the best way of handling the situation.

Martin's example shows us how sometimes we have to dig deeper to discover our own personal values. Sometimes the right response to a situation is not clear. Another person in Martin's situation might have made a different decision based on a different set of experiences and personal values. But what Martin did was to take time out to discover what *he* believed was right and what *he* stood for. This then gave him the clarity to act with conviction and courage. It also served as a defining moment for both him and his board, signalling his values around performance and responsibility to the company's stakeholders.

Sometimes this is not easy. Martin took time out to explore his past in order to guide his future decisions. Often, however, we make decisions on the spur of the moment or in the midst of events. In these situations, we may be driven by all sorts of motivations – desires, fears, motivational values, personal goals, needs, etc. – and it is easy to make decisions that are out of line with our idealistic values. We saw this with Bill in Chapter 6, who, on reflection, discovered that he had acted in a way that had contravened his values. Despite believing in teamwork and consultation, he had made decisions in isolation and imposed them on the team with no consultation. However, it was only

by taking time out to explore his feelings of guilt that he had recognized this. His guilt, in turn, had been triggered by feelings of compassion for his team. Bill had opened himself up to these feelings of guilt and compassion by listening to their expressions of confusion, anger and anxiety. Bill puts it graphically:

'we got that wrong because I'm learning. The trouble is, you're learning in a living environment, so things happen and you're not at that level of knowledge to actually deal well with the decisions you're making sometimes. You're always at the edge of your knowledge boundaries when you're making decisions, but it's only when you gain more knowledge that you realize those decisions weren't quite as good as they could have been.'

Sometimes learning from your values involves taking time out to explore and clarify what you believe. Sometimes it involves reflecting on the past and facing difficult emotions such as guilt or a sense of damaged competence. However, time spent exploring these feelings does, as Bill suggests above, yield rich learning. It expands the complexity of one's living knowledge and, in particular, enables the individual to adapt in morally and ethically complex situations.

5. The Discipline of Integrity

Jeremy Paxman, in his book *The Political Animal*, quotes a politician, Humphrey Berkeley:

'Most politicians are simultaneously cynical and idealistic, self-centred and disinterested, candid and cunning. They are susceptible to the grossest flattery; they rival actors in their sustained ability to talk about themselves and ruthlessly to wrench any discussion into an examination of their own ego and its relationship to the matter being discussed. I recognize all these qualities in myself. . . . In many cases . . . they are jealous of their contemporaries. This feeling I have fought and overcome. Jealousy is poison. If you are embarked upon an enterprise where the stakes are as extreme as Downing Street or the gutter, you must rid your system of poison'.⁸

⁸ Paxman, J. (2003) *The Political Animal*. London: Penguin, p. 280.

Leaders will never be great, and we will never be well-led until we face a fundamental fact about human nature – one which our humanist and post 1960s culture has tried for so long to deny – that human beings contain a potent mixture of good and bad – altruism, self sacrifice, generosity, kindness, patience and love are intertwined with greed, lust, pride, jealousy, anger and self pity.

This is something that was acknowledged and recognized until relatively recently. Covey points out that up until 50 years ago, leadership development was focused on the notion of developing ‘character’. He cites Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography as representative of the ‘character’ literature – emphasizing the importance of virtues such as: integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity and modesty. These are virtues that have to be worked at, precisely because they are ‘idealistic’ values – not behaviours that come naturally to us. These are not values that express our needs, goals and desires. They need to be worked at because we are constantly tempted to do the opposite, especially when we are in positions of power. Pick up any political autobiography and you will see signs of falsehood, arrogance, infidelity, excess, avoidance of what is right, impatience, laziness and pride. Not all the time of course! But they are all there at different times – and nowhere is this more clear than in Alan Clark’s diaries. One of the reasons his diaries are so admired is that he paints a picture of human nature as it really is, and which is rarely publicly admitted to.

Covey then describes the literature of the last 50 years, which shifts from what he calls the *character ethic* to the *personality ethic*. The personality ethic focuses on the skills and behaviours you need to adopt in order to gain success – and can be ‘manipulative, even deceptive’. Alternatively, it encourages a ‘positive mental attitude’, which, in turn, is often at the root of our denial of the darker side of our human nature. Covey summarizes the main message of the personality ethic literature as consisting of ‘quick-fix influence techniques, power strategies, communication skills and positive attitudes’.⁹

⁹ Covey, S. R. (1999) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. London: Simon & Schuster, p. 9.

This focus reflects a deeper change in the values promoted in our Western society. In previous ages we would have learned about values such as ‘love for others’, ‘temperance’, ‘humility’, ‘obedience’, ‘patience’, ‘gentleness’ and ‘self control’.¹⁰ Now, we simply recoil with disgust at the ‘weakness’ of such words. Our society has merged idealistic and motivational values, so that the motivational values of success, status, power, independence, achievement and individualism become the idealistic values of consumerism, self expression, personal freedom, competition and self fulfilment. With the decline of challenging idealistic values, we have no constraints on our behaviour, unless we are disciplined enough to restrain ourselves.

If leaders are going to be able to expand their range of values, walk the talk and learn from their values, we need to introduce notions of duty, morality, discipline and integrity into our leadership development processes. Leaders need to develop self awareness and self discipline to ensure their words, decisions and behaviour are in alignment. This is an ongoing, lifetime task, which is difficult to undertake without some help. This is why some leaders have taken to the idea of having spiritual directors. Many spiritual directors are people who have devoted themselves to the challenge of putting the really difficult idealistic values into practice, e.g. monks or nuns. These people are able to support, challenge and gently point out those areas where we are liable to blind spots and self deception. Furthermore, they hold us accountable to ourselves, making us focus on those areas in our lives where we know (but do not like to admit) we have moral and ethical weaknesses!

This chapter has focused on the last of our learning practices – nurturing integrity. It is hoped that, far from being an innate tendency that someone simply has or lacks, integrity is recognized as a skill that can be nurtured and strengthened like any other skill. We have seen that, when necessary, people can expand their range of values and go beyond their own definition of what is ‘right’. Often, our definition of ‘right’ is simply a personal preference that suits us, rather than a moral absolute that is appropriate for all times and places. When in

¹⁰ Father Dermot Tredget, a Benedictine monk based at Douai Abbey in Berkshire, runs workshops and retreats where he helps people apply these spiritual values to develop balance, wisdom and meaning in their professional and personal lives. His clients include a range of public, private and not-for-profit organizations.

leadership, it is important to recognize when you are called to question your values to adapt to the values of others, and when you are called to stand firm on your values. This is not always easy to do.

We have also seen the complexities involved in ‘walking the talk’. It is difficult to walk the talk, as, like all human beings, we are driven by a conflicting melee of goals, needs, desires and motivational and idealistic values. Often, in the battle of the drivers, idealistic values come last. People with integrity are those who are prepared to choose idealistic values, often at the expense of their own self interest. Looking back at Chapter 3, we remember Dr Stephen Bolsin, who decided to bring a powerful group of doctors to the attention of the authorities in order to save the lives of sick children. He had nothing to gain from such an action and everything to lose. In fact, he lost much of what he valued; he was unable to find a job in his own country and eventually emigrated to Australia. He sacrificed his own self interest for the sake of others – this is an example of integrity. Most of us are not called to make such sacrifices. For most of us, integrity simply involves being aware of our more selfish drivers and ensuring that our decisions do not negatively affect the interests of those we represent.

Finally, we looked at the challenges involved in learning from our values. We examined those ‘defining moments’ when we are called to choose between right and right. These are moments where we discover our deeper values, revealing to others who we really are and what we stand for. In doing so, we help others make sense of complex situations, demonstrating what we believe is right and important. We also looked at the challenge of learning from guilt, when we may have contravened our values. Though not pleasant, learning from guilt can yield rich insights and change if we are courageous enough to confront the truth.

Nurturing integrity involves re-examining the values which we promote in our organizations and societies. It involves going back to an older tradition, where leaders were encouraged to develop humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity and modesty. Integrity has to ‘work’ – in other words, people who manifest it have to be valued and promoted. Unless integrity is embedded within our systems, it will be difficult to nurture – but it will take people of courage and integrity to ensure those systems are changed.

