



The Conscious Leader

Nine Principles and Practices to Create a Wide-Awake and Productive Workplace

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

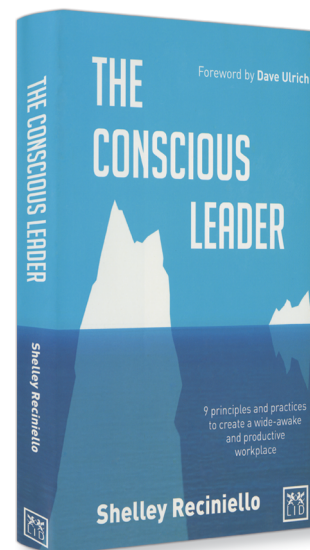
Why do things go wrong in companies that shouldn't? The answer, according to Dr. Shelley Reciniello, often lies deep beneath the surface in the unconscious processes of leaders and their employees.

Working as a sort of psychological detective, Reciniello consults with organizations and individuals to figure out what the real problem is when a posed-for-success corporate initiative fails, when a promising individual or team can't perform, or when a well-conceived departmental project doesn't deliver. When what has gone wrong doesn't make sense, Reciniello looks for the unrecognized, underlying problem and often finds that what's going on unconsciously, out of awareness, is more important than what is happening on the surface.

How can you wake up and become conscious of secret motivations, unrecognized Achilles heels, and hidden agendas in yourself and your employees? *The Conscious Leader* describes the nine most fundamental but often neglected truths about human beings and their workplace behavior in jargon-free, accessible concepts and examples. With humor and inspiration, Reciniello provides the principles and practices necessary for conscious leadership that you can immediately apply in your organizations.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why success depends on making "the unconscious conscious."
- The nine psychological principles that undermine companies and leadership.
- How to overcome classic defense mechanisms and help organizations achieve positive growth.



by Shelley Reciniello

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE CONSCIOUS LEADER

by Shelley Reciniello

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Introduction

People don't leave their psychological selves, conscious or unconscious, at home when they come to the office, and there are many permutations of how work and self, and self and others, collide. You may know your business, have brilliant ideas and an eager workforce, but if you don't know what happens to people — and that includes you — when they enter the workplace, you will undoubtedly waste time and money and minimize your success.

Someone once asked Sigmund Freud, "What do we have to do in order to be mentally healthy?" He answered that we must be able to "love and work." He meant that we need to love and work with an awareness of *both* conscious and unconscious variables.

You're thinking, "Isn't running a business difficult enough without worrying about what I don't see?" But like it or not, doing business today also requires navigating the underground psychological terrain of people at work: egos that run amok putting personal success ahead of corporate achievement; palpable, underlying anger that surfaces in response to company policies, ill treatment by a manager, or even your own grandstanding.

In the incredible pressure cooker that is the modern workplace, how do you keep your eye on a ball that is increasingly invisible? By understanding the basic psychological principles of people at work and applying them daily. Corporations are *not* people, but they are made up of people, and to ignore the imperfect humanness of professional interactions is a foolish omission that will always undermine success and satisfaction. You can have no illusions about how that affects your bottom line.

There are nine important psychological phenomena that undermine companies and leadership every day. But there are also antidotes to these phenomena and practices necessary for conscious leadership that you can immediately begin to apply in your organizations.

From the boardroom to the mailroom, employees are often elated when they understand how these nine challenges and the accompanying insights operate in their lives. This information helps them to normalize their reactions so they can see themselves without judgment and become open to changing their opinions and behaviors.

Knowing ourselves, our complexities and our triggers, handling the quirks of others instead of letting them affect us, valuing and maximizing the challenge of diversity, understanding how to deal with anger coming at us or from us, learning how to increase our personal power and use it appropriately, and dealing with change positively are some of the ways we can enhance our personal and professional effectiveness.

All this becomes possible when we learn to look beneath the surface. The effort will be worth it. Beginning with yourself, you can create leadership and a culture that is conscious, wide-awake and productive. ●

Why Everything Goes Wrong When Everything Seemed Right

Psychological Principle #1: Human beings are not rational, and every day their illogical, unconscious minds are walking into offices with hidden agendas.



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 511 School House Road., Suite 300, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2014 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. **Available formats:** Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (240-912-7513 outside the United States), or order online at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

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Every day all over the world, people enter the workplace with their own personal preoccupations: work pressures, health concerns, money worries, family problems, relationship issues, political viewpoints and more. That's a lot of variables to consider. And these are the easy ones because they're the things that people are generally aware of — conscious of — although they can still impact their work and be difficult for others to cope with.

But the ones they haven't got a clue about — the ones that are unconscious — are the really tricky ones, like unresolved childhood and family issues, fears, anxieties, fantasies, drives, prejudices, obsessions and complicated emotions like anger and guilt. That's what is happening when you sabotage something you've been striving for, such as a promotion or a deal — or when someone gets angry with you for no obvious reason. You become upset and confused because the behavior is illogical. And that is indeed the problem.

According to psychoanalytic thinking, we act irrationally because we are motivated by unconscious forces that our conscious minds are constantly struggling to control. We keep them out of our conscious awareness because we feel that they are shameful or frightening or dangerous. Things like impulses, feelings, fears, motivations and desires that come from ourselves, our childhood experiences, life events and interactions with other people.

Why Being Conscious Matters

Your organization is shaped by the hidden feelings and fears, desires and needs, motivations and ambitions of each of your employees and, most definitely, your own. Secret motivations and hidden agendas are time bombs that threaten success. The only antidote is to make “what is unconscious conscious.” That is how we strengthen our rational selves. By knowing the whole story about ourselves and the people we interact with.

Because we have become too focused on behavior in our approach to problems, we have also become more and more action-oriented, less reflective and, therefore, less insightful. As a leader you must be alert to the pull to act for action's sake — to shoot first and ask questions later. This kind of movement is the result of faulty logic and leads to bad decisions. The rational mind, both the individual one and the corporate one, can only be strengthened by dealing with unconscious issues, not pretending they don't exist.

Without reflection and introspection, irrationality stays underground where it grows more potent every day. Consciousness requires that you become wide awake and that you stay wide awake and alert to business practices that are not conscious.

Becoming comfortable with not knowing, with taking the time to understand the conscious and unconscious elements of a situation as well as the motivations of everyone concerned, including yourself, to ask appropriate questions of the right people, to reflect and to decide what, if any, action is warranted, is the work of the leader who strives to stay conscious. ●

When Leaders Don't Know Their Achilles Heels

Psychological Principle #2: Self-delusion is the single biggest trap for a leader.

In order to avoid fantasies and delusions, leaders must be open to self-knowledge and how they are actually perceived by others. How do you ensure this in yourself? You start by taking a deep dive into your history, your life and your work experiences — all of which are responsible for most of who you are — and answering a lot of questions about yourself honestly.

What Do You Carry?

We all carry things with us that no longer apply to our lives, yet we act like they do: memories of parents, school-teachers, friends, classmates; words and incidents that hurt, embarrassed and frightened us. We suffer neurotically when we react to something that no longer pertains to our lives as though it were happening now. But without understanding that and without knowing what we are unconsciously clinging to, we have these unconscious needs and forces directing our present days.

What from your past are you still reacting to in the present? What pain, injustice or anger do you cling to? How might these unconscious memories influence your choices and behaviors? What unacknowledged attitudes, prejudices fears or resentments do not serve you well? What pretensions and possessions do you use to distance, define and protect yourself?

True self-knowledge without delusion is power; the lack of it is self-deception that will always leave you powerless and vulnerable to others.

Easy Wins 101

To be successful, it's important to score easy wins. Easy wins are the things you can do that will stand you in good stead so that you can succeed with the harder challenges. But if you get these wrong, you will annoy people, and they will not even consider you for the rest.

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The first easy win is about being on time because time is an important way that we communicate with others. If you are always late, you are saying that your time is more important than theirs, and therefore, that you are more important. Become conscious of whether you ever use time to assert power and control over others.

The second easy win is similar and involves getting back to people and delivering what you say you will. Whether it is a promotion you promised, an initiative you pledged to support, or financial backing you allocated for a new business, people will hold you to your word.

The third and last easy win has two parts: watch being negative in your word and deed, and don't gossip, especially not about your people. The easy wins are a good place to begin because they really speak to cultivating accountability, professionalism, respect and consideration for others, and having a positive, nonjudgmental attitude. These are basic qualities upon which you can build your leadership.

The more you learn about the irrational in you, the unconscious issues, the conscious secrets, the more you can strengthen your rational self. ●

When Personalities Get in the Way of Business

Psychological Principle #3: Everyone can't be like me.

All human beings have traits which are really defense mechanisms. These traits are the methods by which we attempt to keep all those feelings and thoughts that we find objectionable or shameful away from our awareness and tucked into our unconscious minds. When we become open to an awareness of which defenses we tend to use and how and when we use them, we increase our self-knowledge a hundredfold.

What defense mechanisms are your personal favorites, and which ones do you recognize in the people you work with?

Denial. If you don't see it or hear it, then it doesn't exist.

Repression. Similar to denial, but it stops things before there is anything to deny. People "forget" what has happened to them, as is common with victims of trauma and abuse. In the office, repression is often the reason people may claim that they were not told something, because they didn't want to know it or do it. In most cases, they are not lying; repression has kicked in to save them from recalling the offending comment or task.

Projection. If someone has a trait or a desire or a fear that he finds deeply unflattering or bad, he needs to get rid of it. So he tosses someone else the hot potato, he no longer has it, and the problem is "solved."

Displacement. Redirected aggression. It is what is behind the classic example of the man who kicks his dog when he is angry at his boss.

Intellectualization. A way to focus on an idea in the abstract and in great detail in order to alleviate anxiety.

Remember, the use of a defense happens unconsciously — the undesirable trait is not consciously acknowledged nor is the antidote. The overall purpose is always to keep the image we have of ourselves consciously untainted by characteristics we find objectionable, which are rooted to what happened to us in our past. The main objective is that you start to think in an insightful way about how you and other people function psychologically. ●

When Organizations Repeat Family Dynamics: Who's Your Daddy?

Psychological Principle #4: Organizations repeat family dynamics.

The déjà vu of the workplace is a real phenomenon because corporations and other entities have structures like families. There are authority figures who become like parents, and our peers and co-workers become the siblings.

Transference doesn't only happen in therapy or in coaching. It happens at work. We project qualities from old relationships, or from relationships that live only in our fantasies, onto the people we work with. They, in turn, may experience a **counter-transference**, wherein they become or resist what we project upon them.

Like families, companies require that we belong to them; they demand loyalty and obedience, and for this we are rewarded. Like our familial homes, they are more or less welcoming, more or less safe, and we don't want to be chucked out until we are ready to go. Working with others inspires us to recreate relationship patterns we have known in the past or wanted in the past. These relationships can be positive or negative. They can be triggered by something that is actually occurring, but they are usually unrelated, in reality, to what is going on in the present interaction. The workplace can provide the opportunity, but we are the ones who create the roles and write the dialogue.

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Leadership, Transference and Counter-Transference

Transference is built into leadership. People look to someone who is powerful to solve problems, make promises and create possibilities, someone who will deliver them out of the wilderness. But if the transference is excessive, if the need is too great, something dangerous can happen. That is when people follow leaders who encourage them to violate their previously held values.

We happen to be living in an age and in a culture where business leaders are the new heroes on the much-preferred battleground of fame and fortune. People fantasize about being a Steve Jobs, and he is held up along with Bezos, Buffett and others as the new ideal. The media stokes the fire that turns transference into hero-worship, and admirers are plunged into the infantile posture of dependence and compliance.

Think about your style and whether or not you encourage transference. What are your fantasies about the people who work for you? What is your counter-transference? How do you think of them? What do you call them? Are they your kids or your other kids? Are they your troops or your guys (in the generic sense)? Are they your people of your team? Folks? Minions? Girls and boys?

You want to be clear with your employees about the actual relationships you have with them so as not to feed their imaginations. It is easy to take advantage of people in the workplace, so keeping appropriate boundaries is essential, and you should encourage a culture that is alert to not giving mixed messages.

Your responsibility is to stay on target. Don't muddy the waters. When things seem off, ask for clarification and reinstate boundaries. You help people to remember why they are here, what their role is, and what they contribute to the organization. You root them in the present reality; no more and no less. ●

When People Regress in Groups: Teams or Gangs?

Psychological Principle #5: People regress in groups.

Group spirit is hard to resist, and people often act differently when they belong. Groups at their best can become teams wherein several individuals work together collaboratively to complete a task for a common goal. Or groups can become gangs wherein people lose their individual

views and values and act in ways that they never would act on their own. That is because of Principle #5.

The most obvious characteristic of a group is that it can obscure individuals and, therefore, individual responsibility. Responsibility gets diffused. People can hide in groups and get away with bad behavior. If you are thinking that this sounds very childish, you are right. Regression is a defense mechanism that lets us return to an earlier time in our lives and a more primitive way of behaving.

Why do people regress? We do it in response to some feeling or situation that we want to avoid knowing. When people come to work, they want to feel protected, safe and accepted. Sometimes organizations are not very secure places, and this causes employees to regress. If the organization doesn't seem to be a safe place, people will seek safety in numbers, in their work group or teams. If employees are not appreciated for who they are and if the message they receive is to conform, blend in, agree with and support the company at all costs, the whole organization will be in a regressive state.

How to Create Progressive not Regressive Groups

Perhaps the easiest measure of the consciousness level of an organization is to observe how well its teams really function. If you lead groups and are a member of groups, think about what goes on. In the groups you lead, are you the designated leader, or did you assume the role? Do you create a climate where people can disagree? Who tends to dominate, and who is mostly silent? Are there running jokes? Are they at anyone's expense?

When you are a team member, do you feel free to express your viewpoints even if they run contrary to the leader's or to the group's at large? Do you feel safe with your colleagues? Do teams meet their deadlines and accomplish their goals?

Teams can get past issues when they are run by responsible, conscious leaders who insist on respectful and productive collaboration. If you want to have groups that are respectful of each other and a culture that puts people first, you need to figure out how the difficult calls should be made and make sure you model that behavior. Work with human resources to create consistent policies and practices, and give HR professionals the authority to make sure business partners work with them to get it right.

Start by putting in programs to bring back manners that include rules defining how people are expected to act. For example, if there is an email disagreement, employees must arrange a face-to-face meeting or phone call to discuss the

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issue, rather than leave behind a trail of snarky emails that have been copied to everyone and his aunt Lillian.

We also need to establish some taboos in order for groups and individuals to resist regression. Your leadership must provide the structure and the sense that what goes on here does indeed matter in small ways and big ways. The taboos that restrain regression must come from you. You must let it be known that you will not accept bullying, scapegoating, rudeness, meanness and inappropriate, unethical behavior of any kind. ●

Making Diversity Real

Psychological Principle #6: Everyone has preconceived notions of others, and these are largely unconscious.

With a globalized economy comes the need for the capacity to relate to people who are from different worlds, who look and act in ways that are different from you. If you and your workforce can't match those differences with openness and curiosity and respect, your competitors will. And the best way to achieve that edge is to make sure that you have a workforce that understands, through its own experience, how to communicate and relate and negotiate across difference.

That means that you need to hire, train, mentor, sponsor and promote people who are not the same as you. It means that if you do not want to be caught in a talent vacuum, you accept that talent now comes in different packages. But the majority of diversity programs have not produced the kind of results hoped for or required. This is because of Principle #6.

You may feel yourself becoming uncomfortable with this and react with, "This doesn't apply to me. I am not a prejudiced person." Think about it this way: evolutionary instincts and primitive cognition still cause us to seek out faces that look like ours for comfort and safety. We are still hardwired to recognize features that are similar to our own. But we also get into trouble if we do the opposite.

We Look for Differences and Overlook Similarities

If we are not conscious of what our individual prejudices are or might be, we may not realize how much attention we direct toward the differences between ourselves and others. We may seek them out with a vengeance to assure ourselves that the "other" is not like us, so that we can remain safe. If we keep things black or white, so to speak, we will know where we stand, secure in our comfort zone of familiarity.

When we focus on what is different in others, we can stick to our preconceived notions of them, and the possibility of real connection is lost. When we recognize that we share the essentials of being human and all that entails, differences become opportunities for our enrichment rather than psychological barriers.

There is clearly a time to look for the meaningful similarities we share with others that will help us overlook unessential differences. In order to do this properly, we must be conscious of what it is that we carry that influences how we are looking at people and situations. Unless we do the work, we will get it wrong. The poet and professor Dr. Maya Angelou was asked how what she says and writes resonates so thoroughly with such a wide spectrum of people, and she said that it came from "seeing us as more alike than unlike."

When we become comfortable with our essential sameness, our basic humanness, then we can delight in our wonderful differentness. As leaders in the globalized economy, you must take the landscapes of your organizations out of the dreary blue and grey that meant success in years gone by and embrace the true colors of world citizenship. ●

Learn How to Wear the CAP

Psychological Principle #7: Conflict, anger and power are forces you must work to master, or they will master you.

Conflict makes most people uncomfortable, and yet it is a prevalent part of our lives because inevitably we will all have differing views, opinions, needs and desires that will cause us to be in conflict. What do we do, then, with the feelings created by conflict? We are going to choose to live in a state of conflict-anger-power so that we can learn Principle #7.

Conflict: Why do people avoid conflict? Because they are afraid someone is going to get angry — either themselves and/or someone else. If they become angry and say something in the heat of the moment, they risk losing a relationship or an opportunity. And if it's the other person who gets angry and that person has power over them, there could be an even more disastrous outcome. That is why as soon as there is a whisper of conflict, people know that they are on a slippery slope and avoid it at all costs.

Most of the time, people simply need direct, honest feedback and coaching on how to deliver what is required of them. If you resist doing that because it feels too conflictual, you must stop and examine what you are holding

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onto in your unconscious. If you think, “I don’t want to hurt this person,” think again, because your reticence will surely hurt them. The only person you are helping is you, not to feel uncomfortable. You need to let go of that conflicted state and get your passport to the state of conflict where you can deal with reality and not your fantasy.

It has always been true and always will be true that people leave or stay because of their relationship with their immediate manager. The litmus test of a good relationship is the ability of both parties to communicate clearly and to consistently confront conflict. Conflict itself is not the problem. In fact, intellectual conflict often leads to creative ideas and inspired discoveries. It is people’s reticence to engage the conflict in a constructive, respectful manner without anger that is the issue.

Anger: Anger — and we are not talking about aggression — is simply a basic human emotion that has had the evolutionary purpose of telling us that something is not right in our world. It is a natural way to feel when someone takes advantage of us, lies to us, breaks a bond of trust, leaves us, dies or in some way breaks our hearts. Consciously and unconsciously, our anger history is always with us.

We engage in many defensive acts to keep ourselves from becoming conscious of our anger, and these don’t help us deal with the anger; they camouflage it while it continues to grow. These eight behaviors are passive attempts to keep from feeling anger and represent what we shouldn’t do with anger: denial, displacement, indirect attack, blame yourself, depression, sickness, anxiety and self-sabotage.

The first thing to do with anger is to recognize that you are angry. Feel it and own it. Now that you feel it, ask yourself, what is not right in my world that my anger is telling me? Next, review your issues, and honestly think about what angers you. Look at the present and what you might be misinterpreting or over-reacting to, and look at your past and what unresolved anger issues may be playing a role.

What is it about this situation, then, that is really making you angry? Think about the problem and its potential consequences. Is immediate action warranted? If you decide that confrontation is the appropriate course of action, think about the times in your life when you handled your anger most positively and achieved the desired result. How can you get yourself to act like that again, where you are likely to be successful?

Power: With leadership comes the responsibility of understanding and being aware of your power and how it is seen by others, so that you use it wisely, without uncon-

scious agendas, without anger and with compassion. When people in power deliberately use anger to control more vulnerable people, it usually works. It is not uncommon in the workplace, because people depend on having jobs.

Still, abusive bosses who create workplaces that function on fear will never be as powerful as they think they are nor as productive as they could be. Being aware of your power and your anger quotient is essential for conscious leadership. A workforce that walks on eggshells and is constantly fearful of your latest whim or tirade can never be a conscious one.

Having real power today is about being able to look clearly at the big picture and understand where and how you want to influence strategies and policies. It is about building formidable loyalty in your power base, starting with getting those easy wins right so that you are seen as a person of integrity who can be trusted. It is being comfortable with confronting conflict and being seen as a peacemaker rather than a war monger. ●

When Change Is a Constant

Psychological Principle #8: Change is a constant in every workplace.

Like conflict, most people will say that they dislike change. Yet, it is generally acknowledged that more change has occurred in the last decade, largely due to advances of technology, than at any other time in human history. And there appears to be no end in sight.

Our natural, evolutionary response as human beings is to fear change and resist it. It represents the unknown and unfamiliar and carries with it the possibility that we will suffer harm. The complete truth about change is that it is always hydra-headed; it is about both winning and losing.

Since change that you will instigate and change that will befall you is inevitable, it is essential to first understand yourself and how you feel about change, before you can do any justice to it for your employees. How do you, personally, deal with change? Do you try to run from the unknown and seek a solution by rushing to action?

To accept uncertainty is to also become open to the feelings of vulnerability that come with it. Leading from that place is authentic, courageous and inspiring. In order to do that, you need to create a psychological structure for people, a holding tank if you will, to contain the emotions that threaten to swallow them up. You must acknowledge that loss accompanies the change in question and not try to minimize what they feel and how their lives will be altered.

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Getting to Growth and Opportunity

The plus side of change is always growth. If we allow ourselves to move through the initial resistance and accept and mourn the loss that comes with the change, then we can make the transition of the change into a transformation of ourselves and our lives.

Creativity depends on the logical, rational mind collaborating with the illogical, undefended thoughts, feelings and memories that the unconscious mind entertains and embellishes in dreams and fantasies. Change encourages our capacity to be creative, to have a vision in the emptiness, to see how different things could be. When we allow uninhibited brainstorming, we allow the unconscious content to surface and be used positively. In order for this to happen, you must show that creativity is valued. The next time you are tempted to reply, “We always do it this way,” say instead, “Why do we do it this way? How could we do it differently?”

Leadership through change doesn’t mean clairvoyance; it just means guidance. You can’t promise people that everything will be all right; that infantilizes them, and these days no one will believe you anyway. You tell them what the plan is and help them stay the course. ●

The Mind Does Not Take Care of Itself

Psychological Principle #9: Bad mental hygiene destroys thinking, productivity, creativity, and your ability to own the other eight principles.

Left on its own, the human mind doesn’t take very good care of itself. It develops some bad habits. Like having an unwashed body and a mouth full of unbrushed teeth, we may begin our days without the daily maintenance and preparation that our minds require to function properly to meet the day ahead.

Daily Maintenance

Every day you will need to remind yourself of who you are. It has become very popular of late to have people craft a story of themselves in leadership development workshops. But it is important to keep your story honest, so that it doesn’t become a method for hiding from your own truth. It also needs to be current — with updates and new observations — and descriptive of who you are in the present moment.

If daily maintenance sounds onerous, understand that the more you do it, the less time it takes. When leaders

and their employees do not prepare, they are constantly caught unawares, and so many unwanted problems ensue: misunderstandings, arguments, faulty judgments, bad decisions and stunted creativity. Preparation means that your focus is on getting ready to meet the challenges of the day ahead.

Slowing Down

Probably the biggest deterrent to good mental hygiene is the speed with which we live our lives. We have been consistently losing our ability to reflect and calm ourselves. All day long, we make technological efforts to be connected — we email, text, tweet, link, befriend, but is anyone really connecting and reaping the calm and comfort of true connection?

People need breaks, empty mental time without outside stimulation. We need time to center ourselves, to be introspective, to reflect. When you create empty space, you can have your own thoughts. You can connect to yourself free of the agendas of the world, the media, your office or your family. Only then will you know who you are and what you really want from life and from your work. If you don’t make the time to have this kind of relationship with yourself, you may wake up one day only to find that you have been living someone else’s life.

Human progress has always depended on strengthening our rational capacities. That is what “making the unconscious conscious” does. If you are a leader, if you want to be a leader, if you want to be a better leader, consciousness can be your guide to worthwhile achievement and contribution. It is the doorway you must pass through to lead in an awake and mindful state. It is the only way you can hope to embrace the responsibilities of morality, legacy and dignity that come with your great privilege of leadership.

The leadership that needs to be made for our times awaits you. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Conscious Leader*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Tribal Leadership* by Dave Logan, Halee Fischer-Wright, John King.** The authors identify the five stages of employee tribal development and offer advice on how to manage these groups.
2. ***Change the Culture* by Roger Connors, Tom Smith.** The authors reveal how to transform your entire organization through each level of the Results Pyramid: Experiences, Beliefs, Actions and Results.
3. ***Tipping Sacred Cows* by Jake Breeden.** Learn what it takes to overcome the dangerous behaviors that masquerade as virtues at work and how you can lead with fewer self-imposed limitations and greater results.