



## **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEADERSHIP: A RETURN TO BEAUTY**

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## **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEADERSHIP: A RETURN TO BEAUTY<sup>1</sup>**

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*The soul...never thinks without a picture*

Aristotle, 384-322 BCE

Following Aristotle's (n.d.) appreciation that "*The soul...never thinks without a picture*", this article weaves together art and ideas into an aesthetic encounter with our humanity. It invites reflection based on long-established wisdom traditions as well as drawing on insights from everyday sacred traditions. You are invited to engage not just in reading the words presented on each page, but also to stop and meditate on their meaning. You are offered the power of art to intensify your experience and understanding. You are invited to enter into a contemplative silence designed to increase your appreciation of your own and others' humanity while deepening the beauty of your own leadership. Such encounters with art and deep reflection have the power to guide us in rediscovering and creating beauty in our fractured world (Adler, 2015). Encountering art and wisdom through a deeply reflective process does not dismiss science but, rather, partners with all ways of knowing to go beyond what any one approach can produce on its own (Adler, 2015). Thus, the overall invitation of the article is to heighten your understanding of yourself, your role, and your aspirations as a twenty-first century leader.

## TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEADERSHIP A RETURN TO BEAUTY

*I am not a businessman, I am an artist.*

Warren Buffett

(as cited in Bryan with Cameron & Allen, 1998:ix)

More than two millennia ago, Confucius encouraged leaders to seek wisdom and perspective through contemplation, not simply by attempting to create success based on their own and others' experience. Validating Confucius' ancient insight, Harvard Professor Howard Gardner's (1995) contemporary research revealed daily reflection as one of only three core competencies that distinguish leaders who make an extraordinary difference in the world from their more ordinary counterparts.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, noted management expert Peter Drucker (1999) recommended daily reflection, as have many of the most prominent leadership scholars and management consultants. Even with such admonitions to regularly engage in personal reflection and sense-making, management and leadership, both as taught and as practiced, have continued to focus almost exclusively on action rather than reflection (see Loehr & Schwartz, 2001; Palmer, 2000, among many others). Most managers today not only reserve little or no time for reflective silence, they increasingly believe that it is impossible to escape the frenzied pace of work long enough to do so. In this regard, management scholars differ little from the managers they study. They all too frequently see themselves reflected in poet David Whyte's (1994:98) portrayal:

*[W]hen we are in the buzzing-worker-bee mode . . . [w]e do not even have time to find out if our momentum is taking us over the nearest cliff. If we are serious about [who we are as leaders] . . . all of us must confront the question of quiet and contemplation in the workplace.*

Research has now confirmed multiple neurological and psychological benefits of meditation, a deep form of reflection (see Shapiro et al, 2006, and Steinbock, 2007, among others). Ever increasing empirical evidence testifies to how meditation enhances quality of life, reduces stress, increases the ability to focus, facilitates deep listening, heightens the ability to be in touch with what is real, benefits health, and improves brain functioning (Plante, 2010, among others). Not surprisingly, reflection, including meditation, is therefore beginning to be incorporated as an important aspect of classroom pedagogy and executive practice (see Adler, 2015, 2010a & b, 2004a & b, 2002; Delbecq, 2010, 1994; Delbecq & Weiss, 2000; Delbecq & Friedlander, 1995; Kabat-Zinn, 2003, and Palmer, 2000, among others). At Aetna, for example, a major insurance company with \$58 billion in annual revenues, the CEO champions meditation.<sup>3</sup> Among the more than 25 percent of the company's 50,000 employees who have participated in at least one meditation class, there has been "a 28 percent reduction in . . . stress levels, a 20 percent improvement in sleep quality and a 19 percent reduction in pain (Gelles, 2015)." The meditating employees reportedly also became "more effective on the job, gaining an average of 62 minutes per week of productivity each," which the company estimates to be worth approximately \$3000 per year per employee

(Gelles, 2015). Similarly, senior executives at a \$430 million healthcare system have repeatedly expressed the value of reflection, including focusing on spiritual wisdom, stating, “The deliberate intentionality of setting time aside to reflect and focus on what is important is a great gift. ...There are too few venues that provide for this type of support ((Delbecq & McCreedy, 2014: 4-5).” “It is a reminder that we need more than analytical thinking to carry on, and that this ‘other’ dimension should be part of who we are as an organizational community (Delbecq & McCreedy, 2014: 11).”

This article invites you to experiment with a form of aesthetic leadership reflection that was first introduced in 2010 at the 20,000-member Academy of Management Meetings in Montreal.<sup>4</sup> It is based on *Lectio Divina*, a process in which one slowly reads and reflects upon sacred texts. Here we invite you to experience an expanded form of *Lectio Divina* that includes readings from a wide range of spiritual and secular wisdom sources, including the sacred words of the ordinary people and extraordinary leaders who surround our everyday life.<sup>5</sup> The form of *Lectio Divina* presented here adds an aesthetic dimension—reflection on paintings—to the traditional contemplation of written texts. To guide you, see suggestions in the Box: *Going Beyond Words: A Guide to Aesthetic Leadership Reflection*.

The invitation is to leave behind, at least briefly, the *buzzing-worker-bee mode* that David Whyte so accurately describes and to enter into inner silence and peacefulness. From that calm, centered place, we invite you to re-encounter the beauty of our collective humanity—the beauty of words, ideas, art, action, and leadership. Allow beauty in all its forms to illuminate and support the humanity that your own and others’ leadership bring into the world.

**GOING BEYOND WORDS  
A GUIDE TO AESTHETIC LEADERSHIP REFLECTION**

Unlike most writings on management, this article invites you to fully experience both text and images. You are invited to use a style of reading that differs quite markedly from traditional approaches that aim primarily at achieving conceptual clarity, information mastery, and/or the assimilation of a particular scientific perspective. By contrast, the objective of the article is to engage the head and the heart by eliciting readers’ affective, intuitive, and intellectual responses. In the terminology of neuroscience, the intention is to stimulate a broader range of brain functioning than is sought in most conventional articles.

**Leadership Reflection: Going Beyond Words**

Given its departure from traditional publishing norms, we recommend an ancient, yet perhaps unfamiliar, approach for “reading” the article. The suggested process derives from the tradition most commonly associated with *Lectio Divina* (Divine Reading) (Pennington, 1998). Whereas the term is drawn from Western Christianity, the practice is neither exclusively nor uniquely Christian, but rather held in common across multiple spiritual and secular traditions. The process has also been referred to as passage meditation or spiritual reflection.

The steps of *Lectio Divina* involve first slowly reading a passage (*Lectio*), then reflecting on how the inner self responds (*Meditatio*), then non-judgmentally acknowledging the response in a brief further reflection (*Oratio*), and then entering into a silence that allows intuitive and holistic understanding to emerge from within the deep self (*Contemplatio*).

In order to “read” the article in the spirit of *Lectio Divina*, simply use the following guidelines.

**Still the mind.** First, as much as possible still your mind. Enter into what some refer to as beginners mind, allowing yourself simply to receive unexpected insight and

emotion, or to be content for the moment to rest in “unknowing.” In contrast to most leadership work, seek to achieve nothing.

Before starting each new section, step away from all prior conceptualizations, assumptions, and patterns of thought. Indeed, even step away from the insights and emotions stimulated by prior sections of the article.

**Read the passage slowly and out loud.** Then read the same passage a second time. If reading the article together with colleagues, ask a different person to recite the passage the second time. Each stanza or paragraph within a passage can likewise be read by different readers.

The purpose of the readings is to listen and to receive insight, not to analyze or achieve conceptual mastery. Be alert to the words you are drawn to and to the emotion or insight they evoke.

**Reflect.** Take time to non-judgmentally examine your insights and emotions. How is your deep inner-self responding? What personal “knowing” is emerging? Often what people experience in *Lectio Divina* is not ideation or conceptual knowing but rather a more holistic type of sense-making that was not present prior to beginning the readings. Don’t try to force your more holistic knowing into words.

**Express** your response to any emotion or feeling that the readings have evoked in the form of an aspiration, yearning, prayer, or other integrative, holistic response. Again, words are not necessary containers.

**Enter into silence.** Just be silently and holistically present to the experience in a receptive, contemplative openness.

There are obvious benefits to engaging with the readings one section at a time. The *Lectio Divina* tradition normally undertakes only one or several short passages at a time. Likewise, there are distinct benefits when the experience is shared with at least one other person. However, when participating in *Lectio Divina* together with colleagues, the group needs to show great respect and sensitivity to each person and their responses. The purpose of sharing is not to seek agreement, but rather to respect the mysterious ways in which each person’s deep inner self responds to the invitation to refract wise words and beauty. The essential contribution of *Lectio Divina* in this context is an intuitive and emotional arrival at new meanings associated with each individual’s unique leadership journey.

### **Art Supporting Leadership: Going Beyond Words**

*Lectio Divina* need not focus only on the meaning expressed in text passages. Indeed, all traditions go beyond words to derive holistic understanding from other sources. Nature, music, and art have always provided particularly rich sources of inspiration and holistic meaning. This article therefore juxtaposes works of art with wisdom texts. In engaging with art for *Lectio Divina*, the same process is followed as with text. With art, view each painting for at least three minutes, noticing how the texture, colors, composition, and interplay of elements reveal more depth and nuance the longer you view the particular work of art. What is now visible to you that you did not notice when you first began to look at the painting. Slowly become aware of a shift in your consciousness or emotion. You may experience your own distinct set of images that seem to come from deep within you (or from a source that is totally mysterious to you). Just observe the images non-judgmentally. Then respond to your personal visual experience and the emotions the images evoke through aspiration, yearning, prayer or some other integrative, holistic response, remembering that you need not translate your experience back into words. Then, enter into silence in the presence of the art.

To reclaim the role of reflection in your own life, begin by engaging with the powerful images evoked by a Russian poet, the United Nations, and a Canadian sociologist. Read each text out loud slowly, ponder it, and then read it aloud once again. Or ideally, gather with colleagues and friends and read together, letting a second voice echo the words of the first, following each reading with contemplative silence. As you read each text, ask yourself how you might invite inner silence into your life, reclaiming it back from your own *buzzing-worker-bee* world.

### A Reflection from a Russian Poet

*Hurry is the curse of our century  
And man, mopping the sweat from his forehead,  
Zigzags through life like a pawn in a fury  
Of being trapped on the board with his time expired*

.....

*For God's sake stop, even half way,  
Trust Heaven, as you would your fate,  
Think—even if you do not pray  
To God—at least of your own state.*

.....

*When you stride so confidently towards your goal  
Over bodies as though they were steps,  
Stop—you who have forgotten God—  
You are really stepping on yourself!*

.....

*O man, whose very name is sacred,  
Lifting the prayer of your eyes like a periscope  
Over disintegration and hatred,  
For God's sake stop, for God's sake stop!<sup>6</sup>*

*O [woman] . . . whose very name is sacred,*

...

*For God's sake stop, for God's sake stop!*

Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1972: 111-113)  
Russian poet, novelist, essayist, and dramatist

## A Reflection from the United Nations Environment Sabbath Program

*We who have lost our sense and our senses . . . call a halt! . . .  
We declare a Sabbath, a space of quiet: for simply being and letting be,  
for recovering the great, forgotten truths,  
for learning how to live again.*

(as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991: 92)

## A Reflection from a Canadian Sociologist

*To live is to write one's credo, every day in every act. I pray for a world  
that offers us each the gift of reflective space, the Sabbath quiet, to  
recollect the fragments of our days and acts. In those recollections we  
may see a little of how our lives affect others, and then imagine in the  
days ahead, how we might do small and specific acts that create a world  
we believe every person has a right to deserve.*

Arthur Frank

Canadian sociologist

(as cited in Franck, Roze, & Connolly, 1998: 280)

Perhaps the most direct plea to us as leaders—both as thought leaders and as organizational and societal leaders—to reclaim our humanity and to recreate a more humane world is that of Arthur Frank. Frank (as cited in Franck, Roze, & Connolly, 1998: 280) yearns for us to “... see a little of how our lives affect others, and then [to] imagine in the days ahead, how we might do small and specific acts that create a world we believe every person has a right to deserve.”



## ENTERING INTO INNER SILENCE

*Beauty . . . exists in the mind which contemplates [it]*

David Hume (n.d.), 1711-1776, Scottish philosopher and economist

A first step in any contemplative journey is to enter into inner silence. In this silence, we reach toward what spiritual leaders often refer to as beginners mind, allowing us to touch a different level of consciousness. Aided by the art and words of wisdom, we seek to step away from expectations, dropping, for the moment, our personal story and desires. As you enter into inner silence, allow the art and readings simply to flow around you until they flow within you unimpeded. Let Heschel's (1965: 77, as cited in Ryan, 1994: 226) enduring observation—"Silence hovers over all the mountain peaks. The world is aflame with grandeur. [The world is aflame with beauty.]"—guide your eyes to the paintings. Then let the paintings draw you in until you feel the peacefulness, power and commanding eternity of the mountains. Then let the eloquence of the following readings from three of the world's great wisdom traditions guide you further into inner silence. You may choose to return to the images of the mountains after each of the readings.

### A Reflection from the Tao

*If the waters are still, the moon will be mirrored perfectly. If we still ourselves, we can mirror the divine perfectly. But if we cling to the frenetic activities of our daily involvements, if we seek to impose our own schemes on the natural order, and if we allow ourselves to become absorbed in self-centered views, the surface of our waters become turbulent. Then we cannot be receptive to Tao. Muddy waters will become clear if allowed to stand undisturbed, and so too will the mind become clear if it is allowed to be still.*

Ming-Dao Deng (2013)

Chinese American author, artist, philosopher, teacher and martial artist

### A Reflection from a Christian Mystic

*We do not prepare our minds for a particular message that we want or expect to hear, but rather remain empty, because we know that we can never expect to anticipate the words that will transform our darkness into light. We don't even anticipate transformation. We do not demand light instead of darkness. We wait in inner silence, and, when answered,*

*we are not so much answered by a word that bursts into our silence. It is the silence itself, inexplicably revealed to us as a word of great power.*

Thomas Merton, 1915-1968  
Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani  
Writer, poet, and social activist  
(cited in Phillips, 2015)

## A Reflection from an Abstract Expressionist

*Silence is so accurate.*

Marc Rothko, 1903-1970  
Latvian-born American artist  
(as cited in Smith, 2010)



## **EMBRACING BEAUTY CONTEMPLATING THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF COLOR**

*In art, economy is always beauty.*  
Henry James (n.d.), 1843-1916, American writer

What would leading beautifully look like? Would we recognize it when we see it? Leading psychologists and organization theorists have refocused scholarship on the positive—on courage, wisdom, happiness and an array of other human virtues (see, among many others, Seligman, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; and Cameron & Caza, 2004). Yet rarely have they focused on beauty (for exceptions, see Adler, 2006, 2011a, 2015; Ladkin, 2008; Merrit, 2010; Stephens, 2010; 2015a; 2015b, and Taylor, 2013; 2014). Rarely do we allow the power of beauty to influence our perceptions, behavior, and aspirations as leaders. Given the decades of cultural neglect (see Gablik, 1998 & Hillman, 1998, among others), are we still capable of seeing the beauty that exists in our organizations and in our leadership? Are we still capable of yearning for a world that is beautiful—rather than a world that is

merely less ugly? How do we regain our very human role as leaders, with its imperative to create a more beautiful and compassionate world?

In approaching beauty, art speaks to us in a holistic language beyond words. Art produces appreciation and knowing—a form of understanding—by provoking holistic integration. In distinct contrast, science relies primarily on analysis, a methodology that breaks images and ideas apart in its quest to achieve a similar purpose—understanding. Art seeks to present unique imagery—that which is distinct—whereas science strives to identify the norm—that which is true of the majority most of the time. The artist witnesses the power of the beautiful whole which delights not just the eye but the very being of the beholder. Our next invitation to you therefore is to become totally present to the art that surrounds you, both the paintings included within this article and any works of art in your home or office that you cherish. Let the art take you beyond traditional scientific ways of seeing and understanding.

As in all spiritual traditions, *The Bible* honors the power and the enduring beauty of the mountains, stating in the 121<sup>st</sup> psalm, “*I lift up my eyes to the mountains. From whence gather I strength.*” The paintings presented in this article were purposely selected from among Adler’s *Mountain* series, with images inspired by peaks in Europe, North America, and New Zealand (along with several images from her *Leading Beautifully* portrait series). Notice the visual trail that your eye takes through each painting. Where does your gaze enter the painting? What path does it take through the ridges of color? Where does your eye rest before moving on, perhaps to return to an already visited peak or valley, seen now from a new perspective, or to move on within the topography of textures and lines? Notice what attracts you; where your gaze lingers, and when you rapidly travel on.

Invite the paintings into your reflection. Allow them to draw you into the mystery and wonder of the world within each image. Let the art offer you an opportunity to escape the mundane ugliness of everyday life and to enter into your own and the artist’s extraordinary world of imagination, creativity, generosity, and beauty. Rather than selecting what you wish to look at, allow the choreography of color to guide your eyes.

After spending time with the art, continue to hold the images in your mind as you add more words of wisdom to your contemplative experience. Let the following reflections act as trail markers as you traverse the topography of the painting that most attracts your eye and your being. Allow the words of wisdom to simply wash over your consciousness as you remain focused on the art before you. If you are together with colleagues and friends, have one of them read the text while you continue viewing the painting that is most attracts your attention.

### A Reflection from the Christian Tradition

*We will have to expose ourselves to beauty, risking the irrationality it stirs up and the interference it can place in the way of our march toward*

*technological progress. . . . We may have to give up many projects that seem important to modern life, in the name of sacred nature and the need for beautiful things.*

Thomas Moore (1992)  
Psychotherapist and author, *The Care of the Soul*  
(as cited by Braque, 2009)

### A Reflection from a Political Leader

*Art employs method for the symmetrical formation of beauty, as science employs it for the logical exposition of truth; but the mechanical process is, in the last, ever kept visibly distinct, while in the first it escapes from sight amid the shows of color and the curves of grace.*

Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton, 1803-1873  
English politician, poet, playwright, and novelist  
(as cited at: [http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/authors/edward\\_george\\_bulwerlytton\\_a001.htm](http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/authors/edward_george_bulwerlytton_a001.htm))

After letting your eye wander across several paintings, choose one. It may be because you love it. It may be because it attracts you, for whatever reason. Or it may be because it annoys you, whether you know why or not. It may feel like you are choosing the painting or like the painting is choosing you. Once selected, allow yourself to reflect on this one painting for at least three minutes; which I guarantee you, will feel like an eternity when contrasted with the norms of our fast-paced, multi-tasking, *buzzing-worker-bee* world.

After having contemplated the work of art you selected, ask yourself: What in your life deserves the quality of attention you just gave to the painting? What in your leadership deserves the quality of attention you gave to the painting? What in the world deserves the quality of attention you gave to the painting?

Dutch artist Frederick Franck (1993) wanted to teach everyone in the world how to draw. Why? Not because he believed that everyone had the latent talent to become a great artist. No, it was because he knew that to draw, one has to be able to see. Franck believed that if each of us could really see one another and the world around us, we would not treat each other or our planet with anything other than dignity. Franck inherently understood that drawing was an essential twenty-first century leadership skill.



## RE-CLAIMING OUR ABILITY TO SEE BEAUTY

*Beauty does not exist to be ignored*

Linda Saccoccio (n.d.), American artist, 1960

Because our present habit of mind is governed by the calculus of consumerism and busyness, we are less and less frequently available to the exuberance of beauty (O'Donohue, 2003:7). "Though we have become more helpless and hopeless, we have grown keenly aware of the urgency and necessity for real and positive change. We grow increasingly deaf to the worn platitudes of staid authority. . . . [We realize that the] zealots of analysis have become blind. In contrast, beauty offers us . . . remembrance of our true origin and real destination. . . . The Beautiful... invites us to surrender so that we can participate in the forming of a new and vital coherence that is native to our desire. In such unsheltered and uncertain times we yearn for this order and coherence . . . (O'Donohue, 2003-8)."

As you heighten your own ability to see beauty by continuing to view just one painting, let the words of wisdom of a Navaho Elder, an American poet, a social commentator, and an Austrian author bring the beauty of the world a bit closer to you and to your leadership. Read each text slowly and out loud. Pause. Then let a second reader recite the same text. Then pause once again, allowing the words to evoke meanings, insights, and emotions that are most relevant to your personal leadership journey.

### A Reflection from the First Nation's Tradition

*With beauty before me may I walk,  
With beauty behind me may I walk,  
With beauty below me may I walk,  
With beauty above me may I walk,  
With beauty all around me may I walk,  
.....*

*My words will be beautiful.*

Navaho prayer chant  
(as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991:32)

### A Reflection from a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Poet

*Beauty is not caused. It is.*

Emily Dickinson (1960), 1830-1886  
American poet

### A Reflection from a Societal Commentator

*The sunrise, of course, doesn't care if we watch it or not.  
It will keep on being beautiful, even if no one bothers to look at it.*

Gene Amole (n.d.)  
American news columnist

### A Reflection from an Austrian Author

*What delights us in visible beauty is the invisible.*

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (n.d.), 1830-1916  
Austrian novelist

How much of the beauty that surrounds you each day goes unnoticed? Lew Welch (as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991: 389), an American twentieth-century beat-generation poet, guides us back toward seeing by requesting that we:

*Step out onto the Planet.  
Draw a circle a hundred feet round.*

*Inside the circle are  
300 things nobody understands, and, maybe  
nobody's ever really seen.*

*How many can you find?*

In what ways are our professional paradigms and penchant for analysis blinding us, including concealing the beauty that surrounds us in the world and in our organizations. I invite you to re-collect the beauty that is supporting you personally, and therefore making it possible for you to lead beautifully. Take a moment to recall the beauty you

have experienced in just the last 24 hours. It may be something you saw, heard, smelled, tasted or touched. It may be an idea you heard from a colleague or a random act of kindness from a complete stranger. Very motivated people often become so focused on their goals for the future that they forget to notice the beauty surrounding them today—those glimpses of what the world, and our organizations and relationships, can be at their best.



## **RECLAIMING OUR ABILITY TO ENVISION THE BEAUTIFUL**

*The human soul needs beauty more than bread.*

D H Lawrence (1950), 1885-1930

English poet, playwright, essayist and literary critic

“Beauty may be what is “most missing in this highly technological world of ours. . . . We value efficiency instead. . . . We create trash. We bask in kitsch. . . . But beauty, right proportion in all things, harmony in the universe of our lives . . . eludes us. We forgo the natural and the real for the gaudy and the pretentious. We are, as a people, awash in the banal. . . . Beauty takes us beyond the visible to the height of consciousness, past the ordinary to the mystical, away from the expedient to the endless true (Chittister, 2000: 26-27).”

As leaders, we need to re-ask ourselves: How can we reclaim our ability to picture a world filled with beauty? Luckily, the leadership needed to create such a world, once only imagined, exists today. For the first time in history, leaders can work backward from their imagination and dreams, rather than simply projecting the future based on the past (see Adler, 2006; and Hamel, 2000). “The gap,” according to business strategist Gary Hamel (2000: 10), “between what people can imagine and what they can accomplish has never been smaller.” In no other era has leaders’ ability to imagine the beautiful been more critical and influential.

The wisdom of the next three business and societal leaders invites us to re-engage with our dreams, not as separate from our leadership but as fundamental to it.

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

Eleanor Roosevelt (n.d.), 1884-1962  
First Lady of the United States  
Author, speaker, politician, and activist

*When you cease to dream, you cease to live.*

Malcolm Forbes, 1919-1990  
Publisher, *Forbes Magazine*  
(as cited in Bryan, 1998: 25)

*It is no failure if you fall short of realizing all that you might dream,  
the failure is to fall short of dreaming all that you might realize.*

Dee Hock (1998)  
Founder & CEO emeritus, VISA

Reflect on the role your dreams play in you being able to bring beauty into the world. What visions do the *Mountains*, each uniquely symbolic of enduring life and aspiration, awaken in you as you allow the images and flow of color to take you back to your own most profound aspirations? As a leader, how do you open not just your own eyes, but the eyes of others to the beauty that could be?

### A Reflection from a Nobel Laureate

*Beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering us for a minute  
the glimpse of an eternity that we should like to stretch out  
over the whole of time.*

Albert Camus (n.d.), 1913-1960  
French philosopher, novelist, and playwright  
Nobel Laureate for Literature

### A Reflection from the Transcendentalist Tradition

*Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful,  
we must carry it with us or we find it not.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (n.d.), 1803-1882  
American philosopher, essayist, and poet

## A Reflection from a Nineteenth-Century French Novelist

*The voyage of discovery lies not in finding new landscapes,  
but in having new eyes.*

Marcel Proust (n.d.), 1871-1922  
French novelist, critic, and essayist



## **RECLAIMING OUR COMMITMENT TO BRING BEAUTY INTO THE WORLD**

*In such ugly times, the only true protest is beauty.*

Phil Ochs (n.d.), musician, singer, and songwriter, 1940-76

In our obsessively bottom-line oriented world, many fear that we have lost our commitment to bring beauty into the world. Have we forgotten the warning of Henry Ford, the highly successful founder of the Ford Motor Company? Ford (n.d.) admonished: “A business that makes nothing but money is a poor kind of business.” Have we forgotten who we are (United Nations Environment Sabbath Program as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991: 70-71)? American poet and essayist Aaron Kramer (as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991: 68) would thunder, Yes!

*They've lost it, lost it  
and their children  
will never even wish for it—  
and I am afraid  
that the whole tribe's in trouble,  
the whole tribe is lost—  
because the sun keeps rising*

*and these days  
nobody sings.*

“When we awaken to the call of beauty, we become aware of new ways of being in the world. We were created to be creators. . . . The time is now right for beauty to surprise and liberate us (O’Donohue, 2003: 7).” It is our moment, as human beings and as leaders, to reclaim our commitment to bring beauty into the world. As leaders we remember that “Beauty . . . is the highest integrative level of understanding and the most comprehensive capacity for effective action. It enables us to go with, rather than against, the deepest tendenc[ies] . . . of the universe (Philosopher Frederick Turner as cited in O’Donohue, 2003:7).”

In your eyes, what makes a painting beautiful? Rumi, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic, tells us to “Let the beauty we love be what we do.”<sup>7</sup> Let the following reflections from a mathematician, an architect, and a ceramicist support you in letting the beauty you love be what you do.

#### A Reflection from a Mathematician

*The mathematician's patterns, like the painter's or the poet's, must be beautiful; the ideas, like the colours or the words, must fit together in a harmonious way. Beauty is the first test: there is no permanent place in the world for ugly mathematics.*

G. H. Hardy (1940: 85), 1877-1947  
English mathematician

#### A Reflection from an Architect, Inventor, and Futurist

*When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think of only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.*

Buckminster Fuller (n.d.), 1895-1983  
Architect, designer, inventor, and futurist

#### A Reflection from a Canadian Ceramicist

*Years ago, when I became committed to the art of pottery, I had a vision of the "perfect pot". . . . I realized that if I ever were to make*

*that sublimely beautiful pot I must first become that  
sublimely beautiful person.*

Brother Thomas Bezanson, 1929-2007  
Canadian artist and ceramicist  
(as cited in Franck, Roze & Connolly, 1998: 281)



## **RECLAIMING THE COURAGE TO BRING BEAUTY BACK INTO THE WORLD**

*To be truly radical is to make hope possible.*

Amory Lovins (2007), environmental scientist  
Chairman & Chief Scientist, Rocky Mountain Institute

Leadership is not a place where suffering is avoided or courage is unnecessary. Rather, as Joseph Campbell attests, transformational journeys always take leaders into the valley of darkness before arriving at a place of light. In this moment of inner quiet, we remind ourselves of the need for courage. Drawing on a deep place of knowing, we remind ourselves that “courage is the ability to have power over [our] . . . fears”; it is not an absence of fear.<sup>8</sup> “Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage as do truth and goodness. . . . (O’Donohue, 2003: 4).

O’Donohue (2003: 6) reminds us that “Courage is amazing because it can tap into the heart of fear, taking that frightened energy and turning it towards initiative, creativity, action and hope. When courage comes alive, imprisoning walls become frontiers of new possibility, difficulty becomes invitation and the heart comes into a new rhythm of trust and sureness.” As you reflect on the following leaders’ understandings of courage, reflect on your own sources of courage. What do you draw on to support your own true voice and most courageous initiatives in the world? How have you transformed fear into courage in the service of the most important contributions you wish to make to your family, your community, your organization, your profession, and to the broader society? What qualities of the painting you are observing evoke courage? Where is courage hiding among the brush strokes, textures, and lines?

## A Reflection from the Celtic Tradition

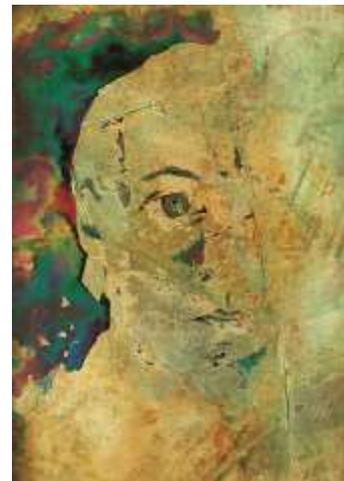
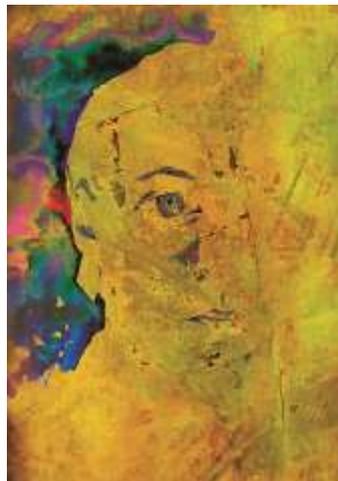
*There are secret sources of courage inside every human heart; yet courage needs to be awakened in us. The encounter with the Beautiful can bring such awakening. Courage is a spark that can become the flame of hope, lighting new and exciting pathways in what seemed to be dead, dark landscapes.*

John O'Donohue (2003: 6), 1956-2008  
Irish poet and philosopher

## A Reflection from a Swedish World Leader

*Listen.  
The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you,  
the better you will hear what is sounding outside without fear.*

Dag Hammarskjöld (n.d.), 1905-1961  
Swedish diplomat and economist  
Second Secretary General of the United Nations



Leading Beautifully from the Self-Portrait series. Nancy Adler, 2015

## **LEADING BEAUTIFULLY**

*We do, with astonishing frequency, produce moments of nobility.  
Our culture just doesn't choose to feature them on the nightly news.*

Donella Meadows, 1941-2001  
Environmental scientist and writer  
(as cited in Franck, Roze, and Connolly, 1998: 96)

It is not always easy to distinguish between doing what we are called to do and doing what we want to do. The most prestigious position can be an expression of obedience to our call, as well as a sign of our refusal to hear that call. Likewise the seemingly least prestigious position, too, can be a response to the call to leadership as well as a way to avoid it. What we are called to do, we can do and do well. When we listen in silence ... and speak with our friends in trust, we will know what we are called to do, and we will do it with a grateful heart.<sup>9</sup>

Having quieted our inner selves through silence and the contemplation of art, beauty, and wisdom, we can now begin to examine our calling as a leader at a deeper level. As we do so, we seek to remain in the questions rather than attempting to find immediate answers. We aspire to lead beautifully even though we do not know exactly what that means for us.

#### A Reflection from the Catholic Tradition

*To lead is to give yourself for things far greater than yourself.*<sup>10</sup>

Joan Chittister, 1936 –  
American Benedictine nun and author

#### A Reflection from the Jewish Tradition

*Silence hovers over all the mountain peaks  
To be is to stand for.*<sup>11</sup>

Abraham Joshua Heschel (n.d.), 1907-1972  
Jewish theologian and philosopher

#### A Reflection from a Chilean Poet

*And while stars and waves have something to say  
It's through my mouth they'll say it.*

Vicnete Hidobro, 1893-1948  
Chilean poet  
(as cited in Roberts and Amidon, 1991: 9)

#### A Reflection from the Sufi Tradition

*If you could only see your beauty,*

*for you are greater than the sun.  
Why are you withered and shriveled in this prison of dust?  
A basketful of bread sits on your head  
but you beg for crusts from door to door.  
You are more precious than both heaven and earth.  
You know not your own worth.  
Sell not yourself at a little price,  
being so precious in the eyes of God.*

Rumi, 1207-1273  
Persian poet, theologian, and Sufi mystic  
(as cited by Smith in Franck, Roze, & Connolly, 1998: 125-126)

### A Reflection from the Benedictine Tradition

*O God  
help me  
to believe  
the truth about myself  
no matter  
how beautiful it is!*

Macrina Wiederkehr  
Benedictine Monastic  
(as cited in Ryan, 1994: 152)

### A Reflection to Guide Us as Leaders

*Mother, Father, God, Universal Power . . .  
Penetrate our souls with the beauty of this Earth. . . .  
Awaken our minds with the knowledge to  
achieve a world in perfect harmony  
And grant us the wisdom to realize that we  
can have heaven on earth.*

Jo Poore  
(as cited in Roberts and Amidon, 1991: 179)

Capture a personal image of yourself as a leader. Take fifteen minutes to draw a portrait of yourself leading beautifully. Use pastels, watercolors, or any other medium, but don't use words. Once you have drawn your leadership self-portrait, show it to several colleagues and let them reflect back to you what they see. Then, only after they have described what they see in your portrait, tell them what you had attempted to communicate about yourself as a leader who leads beautifully. Let your visual image take you beyond what you could express if you had just used words.



**A RETURN TO THE WORLD:  
THE FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW**

*We have a responsibility in our time,  
as others have had in theirs  
not to be prisoners of history  
but to shape history.*

Madeleine Albright (1997: A8)  
U.S. Secretary of State, 1997-2001

“There is an unseemly coarseness to our times which robs the grace from our textures of language, feeling and presence. Such coarseness falsifies and anaesthetizes our desire. This is particularly evident in the spread of greed. . . . Greed is unable to envisage any form of relationship other than absorption or possession. However, when we awaken to beauty, we keep desire alive in its freshness, passion and creativity (O’Donohue, 2003: 4). We remember, once again, that “ownership of something beautiful does not make it more beautiful.”<sup>12</sup>

“Sadly, whether from [busyness, indifference] resentment, fear or blindness, beauty is often refused, repudiated or cut down to the size of our timid perceptions. The tragedy is that what we refuse to attend to cannot reach us. In turning away from beauty, we turn away from all that is wholesome and true, and deliver ourselves into an exile where the vulgar and artificial dull and deaden the human spirit. In their vicinity, we are unable to feel or think with any refinement. They cannot truly engage us because of their emptiness; they pound our minds and [hearts] . . . because they lack the coherence to embrace the inner form of the soul. They are not a presence but an absence that evicts (O’Donohue, 2003: 4-5).

With inner silence, informed by art and the poetry of wisdom, we have examined leadership in the language of beauty. In closing, consider how you might retain this beauty and remember it as you re-enter the busyness of your professional world and day-to-day life.

### A Reflection from the Buddhist Tradition

*Imagine a very poor person living in a decrepit little shanty,  
the only thing this person owns in the world.  
What this person does not know is that just beneath the shanty,  
but hidden in the dirt, is an inexhaustible vein of gold.  
As long as this person remains ignorant of this hidden wealth,  
this pauper remains in poverty;  
But when the person attends more closely to the dwelling,  
the person is bound to discover fathomless wealth.*

B. Alan Wallace (2006), 1950 –  
American author and Buddhist

### A Reflection from the First Nations Tradition

*May your life be like a  
wildflower,  
growing freely in the  
beauty  
and joy of each day.*

Native American prayer  
(as cited in Ryan, 1994: 156)

## A Reflection from the Sufi Tradition

*The breezes at dawn have secrets to tell you,  
Don't go back to sleep!  
You must ask for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep!  
People are going back and forth  
Across the doorsill where the two worlds touch,  
The door is round and open  
Don't go back to sleep!*

Rumi, 1207-1273  
Persian poet, theologian, and Sufi mystic  
(as cited in Roberts & Amidon, 1991: 334)



## EPILOGUE

The intent of this article has been to reintroduce beauty to readers in a holistic manner that supports their potential to contribute to organizations and society in significant ways. The article offers an opportunity to experience how reflection and meditation in the form of *Lectio Divina*, using both the wisdom of world leaders and art, can enrich and contribute to the psychological and spiritual maturity of leaders and enhance their clarity and capacity to lead. Rather than having attempted to achieve a singular outcome or understanding, it is sufficient to have invited each reader to encounter the art and wisdom within the context of their own leadership journey and to have offered a quiet space for them to reflect on their own unique experience. The purpose of the article has been to provide an experience that will serve as an invitation to increase attention to the enrichment of the whole person—body, mind and heart—when developing oneself and others as leaders. At no moment more evident than now, in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, our contemporary world and the organizations that so powerfully influence its culture need leaders whose consciousness is shaped by beauty and wisdom.



## ART NOTES

*To create art is to give to others the fruits of one's contemplation*

Michael Morris, O.P.

A contemporary Dominican's reflection  
on a saying of St. Dominic

The art images included in this article are from Nancy Adler's *Mountain* series and *Self-Portrait* series, created in California, Canada, and New Zealand between 2001-2015. To see the original paintings, contact Nancy at [nancy.adler@mcgill.ca](mailto:nancy.adler@mcgill.ca); some may be viewed at [www.XXXXXXXXXX](http://www.XXXXXXXXXX). To take a virtual tour of the art exhibition at which the *Leadership Insight* session, on which this article is based, was first presented, go to: <http://www.mcgill.ca/desautels/integrated-management/beyond-business/teaching-and-research/art-leadership/exhibition>. Placing art within the article "draws on a rich history of Conceptual artists considering the pages of publications to be exhibition space just as good, or sometimes better, than... elite galleries and art museums (Kennedy, 2015).<sup>13</sup>

### Artwork by Nancy Adler

#### *Self-Portrait* Series by Adler

Pages 2 & 19: *Leading Beautifully*, digital mixed media on Papier d'Arches, 14½" x 10½"

#### *Mountain* Series by Adler

- Page 7: *Luciane's Mountain*, watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 6½" x 14½", Banff, Alberta
- Page 9: *Untitled*, watercolor, oil- and chalk-pastel on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 30", Montreal, Quebec
- Page 12: *Untitled* (detail), watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 15" x 11", Wanaka, New Zealand
- Page 14: *Sunrise*, watercolor, ink on Papier d'Arches, 10½" x 30", Banff, Alberta
- Page 16: *From my studio*, watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 30", Banff, Alberta

- Page 18: *Serendipity*, monotype on Reves BFK, 10" x 22", Montreal, Quebec
  - Page 22: *Untitled*, watercolor, ink on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 15", Banff, Alberta
  - Page 24: *Untitled*, watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 30", Charlevoix, Quebec
  - Page 25: *Untitled*, watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 30", Shark's Spit, Cortez Island, British Columbia
  - Page 32: *Untitled*, watercolor on Papier d'Arches, 22" x 30", Banff, Alberta
- Artwork by Alastair Creamer**  
 Page 33: *Untitled*, watercolor, ink on Papier d'Arches, 11" x 15", Banff, Alberta

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*We stand on the shoulders of giants*

Sir Isaac Newton<sup>14</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Article is based on the *Leadership Insight* sessions that Adler and Delbecq originally presented at Adler's art exhibition *Reality in Translation: Going Beyond the Dehydrated Language of Management* held at Galerie mx. For a virtual tour of the exhibition, go to <http://www.mcgill.ca/desautels/integrated-management/beyond-business/teaching-and-research/art-leadership/exhibition>
- <sup>2</sup> Gardner (1995) labelled the other two core competencies as leveraging and framing.
- <sup>3</sup> The CEO also champions yoga.
- <sup>4</sup> For a virtual tour of the art exhibition at which aesthetic leadership reflection was introduced, go to <http://www.mcgill.ca/desautels/integrated-management/beyond-business/teaching-and-research/art-leadership/exhibition>. To hear the Distinguished Speaker Keynote on Leading Beautifully at the same Academy of Management Meetings, go to: <http://www.mcgill.ca/desautels/integrated-management/beyond-business/teaching-and-research/art-leadership/film-leading-beautifully>.
- <sup>5</sup> Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB., a Benedictine monastic of St. Scholastica Monastery, took the Benedictine tradition of *Lectio Divina* and expanded it. To her, sacred texts are all around us. She weaves together devotional readings from a wide range of what are commonly labeled as

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both sacred and secular traditions. It is in the spirit of *Wiederkehr* that we assembled the readings for the art exhibition and for this article.

<sup>6</sup> The last stanza has been added, as a duplicate of the actual last stanza, with “man” replaced by “woman” so as to include both men and women in Yevtushenko’s plea to.

<sup>7</sup> From Rumi’s poem “Spring Giddiness” as translated by Coleman Barks (1995: 33) and cited in Ryan (1994: 143).

<sup>8</sup> J. Toscano of Brooklyn, NY as cited on May 21, 2010, in “Scott’s Vocab”, *New York Times*, May 23 2010 - <http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/21/weekend-competition-define-courage/?th&emc=th>

<sup>9</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, 1932-1996, Dutch-born Catholic priest

<sup>10</sup> Chittister as paraphrased from her “To be human is to give oneself to things far greater than oneself” as cited in Franck, Roze, & Connolly (1998: 194)

<sup>11</sup> “Silence hovers over the mountain peaks” (Heschel, n.d.-a) and “To be is to stand for” (Heschel, n.d.-b)

<sup>12</sup> William Carmen Soyak III, painter

<sup>13</sup> Artist “Dan Graham, who did such pieces beginning in the 1960s, has described it as “looking for a hole inside magazine culture” where he could show his work to the masses (Kennedy, 2015).”

<sup>14</sup> Paraphrase of Sir Isaac Newton’s “If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giant’s” in Newton’s February 15<sup>th</sup> 1676 letter to Robert Hook.

