

Brilliant Leadership: Are you Reflecting Light or Casting a Shadow?

The giant presence of a lighthouse, topped with a powerful beacon, conjures images of safe guidance and the warning of imminent danger for those travelling by sea. Historically, lighthouses have been used to mark points of hazardous coastline as well as to indicate the entrance to a secure harbor. It is unfortunate that the number of operational lighthouses continues to decline as their purpose is replaced by advanced geo-location technology. Still, the lighthouse itself remains an iconic symbol for a safe journey home and for an illuminated path during difficult times.

Like the lighthouse, a leader is also in a position to provide guidance and to cast a concentrated light on the unseen perils facing people and an organization. Through their personal light do they light the way for others, and from the brilliance at the core of their being are they meant to shine out! Since leaders are asked to perform in ways that are critical to an organization's success, their personal light – their very presence – can go a long way in encouraging the accomplishment of important goals and the fulfilling of an organization's critical mission.

But light during precarious times isn't the only important feature of a lighthouse. A lighthouse must also possess several other equally significant traits. First, a lighthouse must be made from strong, reliable material. In only this way will it be able to calmly withstand the fierceness of any storm that comes upon it. Second, a lighthouse must be very tall. Only through its height does it allow for a vantage point that sees beyond the horizon. Third, the cylindrical shape of the lighthouse's tower houses a spiral staircase within it. This staircase allows one to ascend to imperative heights.

Lighting the way is no small task, and as a leader, neither is taking responsibility for your life and the potential impact you have, both good and bad, on others. After all, for anyone in a leadership role, personal development is a life-long process and not just an isolated event. Like the spiral stairs within the lighthouse, a leader's journey is both one of ascension as well as exploration. And like the lighthouse, the leader must be formed through strong character. Only with a peaceful interior eye can the leader steadily pass through any storm, and only by connecting with and understanding their own light can a leader compel, urge, and draw upon others through their example, their words, and the illuminating power of their own being.

For a leader, the ability to perceive and think differently in times of stress may be much more important than the span of knowledge held. In the "fast moving, never-catch-your-breath" world of business, leaders must provide guidance from the depth of who they are in order to achieve measurable results and to inspire others in the achieving of those results. To be as effective as possible, leaders must align their internal and external worlds so that a safe port will be reached for all.

Our unique conceptual model illustrates what it means to be a brilliant, inspirational leader. The model offers a contextual framework developed from the fundamental idea that two opposite sides of a leader's identity keep co-creating each other. Whatever is inside the leader, like the lighthouse's beam, continually flows outward to illuminate the world outside; while what is outside continually calls out and challenges who the leader is within. Hence, leaders are constantly engaged in this exchange between what is 'out there' and what is 'in here'. When these two forces are aligned and reflected, transformation occurs within the leader which is the foundation for eliciting this change in others.