

99% inspiration

by Lance Secretan

We live in a world where it often seems that our fears outweigh our hope that things can get better. And, yes, there are many concerns worth worrying about. Yet, rather than running from the problems we must embrace a powerful tool that will help us overcome what's wrong-inspiration. It is a force that can truly change the world.

It starts as soon as we climb out of bed in the morning. A vast array of impulses and information begins to stream across the broadband of our consciousness - even before we are fully present in the world. We may begin the day with some precious moments in intimate connection with family or friends - even if just to review the after-school car pool schedule. But the radio, TV or newspaper soon sucks us into a vortex of violence, crises and tragedies. At breakfast we read the labels from the cereal maker or dairy, counting calories, carbohydrates or cholesterol. Already we are multitasking. We pack up our children and their lunch bags and backpacks, and on the fly, we review the school day and work assignments. Breathless and wound up, we hurl ourselves into traffic, and our own unique workday worries as we flow into the world, juiced with fear. And we wonder why we are not more inspired.

Fear is the dominant experience of our lives. We are afraid of health risks, suspicious of our business institutions and governments, wary about our neighbours, nervous about financial insecurity and just plain scared of terrorism, violence and dying.

Because fear is so widespread in modern society, it seems a central part of life. In every field fear is used as the motivating force: religion (join my religion or you'll go to hell); education (learn what I tell you or I will flunk you); parenting (do what I say or I will withhold my love and approval); politics (vote for me or the terrorists will get you); business (do what I say or I'll fire you); advertising and marketing (buy this product or you'll be ugly).

Fear places a wedge in our relationships and distracts us from our daily tasks. It diminishes our effectiveness in the world and the contributions we make as humans. Our basic primal desire is to love and be loved; the second is to inspire and be inspired. But when fear rules our hearts, there is little room for love or inspiration to reside there. When we are frightened we cannot lift up anyone else, because frightened people are not inspiring people and when we are frightening, we are not inspiring.

Yet, there remains a place within each of us that yearns to inspire and be inspired. We long for experiences that fill our days with joy and love. So why is it so emblematic of our times that we are more afraid and less inspired than ever before? Great athletes, artists and musicians know that the quality of their work depends upon mental, emotional and spiritual preparation. The rest of us are no different - this kind of preparation affects everything we do in our lives.

In recent years, we have begun confusing the words "motivation" and "inspiration." The word inspiration is derived from the Latin root spirare meaning "spirit," to breathe, to give life - the breath of God. Webster's Dictionary defines inspiration as "breathing in, as in air to the lungs; to infuse with an encouraging or exalting influence; to animate; stimulation by a divinity, a genius, an idea or a passion; a divine influence upon human beings."

Inspiration is that moment when we access the ineffable, spiritual experience inside us. It is our muse, our creative juice - love and passion and joy bursting from our heart in a tide of beautiful energy. It is an inner knowing that transcends any external motivation. It is quite different from motivation because motivation is a relationship between personalities, while inspiration is a relationship between souls.

Motivation comes from a place of fear. It creates an attitude of scarcity and self-concern - "I want to change your behaviour with a reward or incentive, so that, if you meet the targets or

goals I set for you, I will meet my own needs and goals." Inspiration, on the other hand, comes from a place of abundance, service and love, with no strings attached - "I love you and wish to serve and teach you and help you to grow. When we motivate, we serve ourselves first; when we inspire, we serve others first. Motivation comes from the fear inside us; inspiration comes from the love inside us. They are almost opposites.

After forty years of study, research, writing and teaching on this subject, it has become clear to me that inspiration plays a central role in helping people live fulfilling lives and creating good societies. Inspiration is a serving relationship with others that makes the world a better place.

Technology stands as another critical factor shaping our world. While we benefit greatly from the recent surge of technological innovation such as e-mail, the internet and our "crackberries," we seem to have made a Faustian bargain. Our world has become so accelerated and the demands of life so demanding there is little time to slow down and listen to our souls. It seems we are more invested in solving the small, the mundane and the often superficial problems of life, than in asking the more important questions. We are in danger of undernourishing our inner souls, forgetting to invite it to be an equal partner with our worldly egos. In the process, we find ourselves dragging our weary minds to work or school or to our parenting roles, while leaving our hearts behind. We're exhausted, with no spark left for the deeper essence of life.

If we truly wish to move from being tired to inspired, it will take courage, energy, creativity and deep resources. For example, the much vaunted capacity to multitask is simply a bad - and uninspiring - idea. Experience someone talking to you and answering their e-mail at the same time, and you will understand what I mean. Doing lots of things at once leads to doing many things poorly. Multitasking may contribute significantly to the decline of inspiration because it thwarts excellence. Can you imagine great concert pianists performing at the same time as checking their voicemail?

If we want to achieve mastery in anything - and therefore be inspired by our contribution - we need to focus on one thing at a time, and accomplish it brilliantly. This can happen by focusing our resources and talents, by slowing down, empathizing and serving others, by giving that rare gift: our full attention. The inspiring thing about inspiration is that it can naturally flourish in almost every aspect of our world including organizational leadership government, education, religion, media, healthcare and communications as well as the soul spaces that make up our everyday lives. This is because inspiration comes from that spiritual centre that is within us all.

The creeping and insidious phenomenon of the modern era is that our personalities are becoming richer and richer, while our souls become poorer and poorer. Our personalities are being whipped into a frenzied spiral of acquiring more, doing more and moving faster, while our souls feel empty and yearn for renewal. Voices within us warn of the growing conflict between our personality and our soul. We are precariously poised at a moment of great danger and great hope. This is seen especially in the worlds of work, politics, entertainment and sports, where the great emptiness within the human spirit is most apparent.

The good news is that this loss and lack of fulfillment is temporary. By honouring our souls once again, we can restore joy, grace and inspiration throughout our lives.

This, however, poses a challenge for many of us because our experience has been forged through polishing our skills of manipulation and exploitation to unparalleled brilliance. Even though this cult of personality has ruled our society for many years, we can reclaim higher ground by rediscovering and revering our souls once again. This will be a new experience in our time and therefore a difficult change, but it will yield a quantum leap in human fulfillment and inspiration, producing a change so profound that it will seem like a revolution. We each have the power to choose whether we live a life that inspires or one that feeds on and generates fear and scarcity.

Recently, I was working closely with a group of 30 CEOs from a large organization to build more inspiring corporate cultures by helping them communicate from their souls to the souls of their employees, vendors and customers. After I had finished presenting my ideas, one of them turned to me and let loose a vituperative volley of criticism wrapped in much sarcasm and personal denigration. Having ventilated, he sat down. Floored, I took some deep breaths. I looked at my intimidator. Thirty faces turned to me and the air was still - everyone held their breath. I knew this was a teaching moment. I took another deep breath and I said, "Tom, I appreciate what you are trying to say, but I wonder if you could say it again in a way that inspires me?" Deafening silence. Slowly, everyone let out their breath. A successful teaching moment had occurred.

All great leaders and teachers have known three things: Why they are here on this planet - their Destiny; What they stand for - their Cause; and, What they will do, how they will serve others with their gifts and talent - their Calling. I call this understanding the Why-Be-Do. Leaders who have clarity about their Why-Be-Do inspire others through their own example - they lead authentic lives. They know how to bring out the best in others, and they have a gift for being inspired themselves.

Many of the people who have brought the most good to our world deeply understood the importance of inspiration. Think of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa. Gandhi's life was authentic - when asked to describe his mission he said, simply "My life is my message." Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King didn't have a quality program or a strategic plan - they didn't need one - but they each knew their Destiny and they had a Cause so compelling that it became a magnet for the passion of others.

Wally Amos, the founder of Famous Amos Cookies, has let inspiration be his guide in the business world. He is a warm, larger-than-life character, and uses his fame to support educational causes. Wally's life-long goal has been "helping people feel good about themselves."

When you stand in the presence of someone, like Wally - someone who has a deep, inner knowing of their purpose in life, someone who is very clear about Why he is here on Earth, about how he will Be while he is here, and what he has been sent here to Do, you can feel the power of his energy. This is the power of knowing the answer to these three questions: the source of inspiration.

It is hard to be inspiring if your Destiny, Cause and Calling are not aligned - in personal life, organizations, religion, politics or education. The important thing to underscore here is that none of these places can become inspiring until each individual within them is inspired.

When we peel away the outer theories and exterior models postulated by so many theorists of coaching, parenting, mentoring, teaching and leadership, one thing is revealed to be the essence of greatness - inspiration. After all what do great leaders, teachers, coaches and mentors do? They inspire us. Anyone who has had a great influence on our lives, helping to shape who we have become, has been an inspiring person - not a motivator. Our society's emphasis on motivation - the heart of 90% of efforts in the behavioural field today - has caused us to focus unwarranted energy on the mechanics of human relationships, instead of the essence. It's like seeking the scientific data about the sunset rather than the joy, beauty and experience of the sunset itself. Creating an inspiring relationship - and who does not yearn for this? - is something one lives, not something one does. As jazz master Charlie Parker said, "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn." This is how we become as accomplished in inspiring others through love as we have become accomplished in motivating others with fear.

Let's look at a couple of examples of what a difference the practice of inspiration can make in the real world. There is no place more "real" than the healthcare system and schools.

Healthcare providers worldwide follow the motto to "first, do no harm," yet, industry statistics and stories illuminate the opposite. According to the National Institutes for Health, in the United States, which is one of the better places in the world to be sick, 300,000 people die each year as a result of medical errors and 7,000 more through prescription errors. Hospitals are one of the leading causes of death. Much of modern healthcare follows a fear-based, germ-theory system that falls short of people's need to live inspired, healthier lives - 70% of those surveyed now seek complementary medical alternatives, including praying for healing, taking herbs and botanicals, meditating, doing yoga and deep breathing, seeking massage and chiropractic care and following diet-based therapies.

Healthcare, like other complex, people-centric industries, is aware of its need to evolve, if it is to meet the needs of patients, employees, and partners. The industry knows the power in asking the simple five-word question: "How may I serve you." The following examples illustrate the noticeable shift that occurs when focus moves from motivation to inspiration, from fear to love.

"The ideal hospital would combine the best of spas with the best of hotels and the best of hospitals to become a truly healing environment, where just being there is healing," said Angelica Thieriot, founder of Planetree, a non-profit organization that wants to change the way patients and families experience hospitals and healthcare.

When Centura Health was planning a new hospital in Parker, Colorado, I met with the architects to offer suggestions for adding greater environmental inspiration. My ideas, I was told, would add \$10 million U.S. to the agreed \$180 million U.S. cost for the building. To the company's credit, many of the ideas were adopted and in February 2004, Centura Health opened Parker Adventist Hospital, a remarkable facility that has already received two awards recognizing their contribution to healthcare and architectural design. Dan Noble, principal/design director of HKS, Inc. describes his vision of the hospital in this way: "Design elements such a three-story fireplace anchoring a spacious, light-filled lobby, greet visitors and create a strong initial impression as one enters through the hospital's front door. The design team wanted this first and lasting impression to be inviting, non-institutional and supportive of healing environment concepts."

The additional cost of \$10 million U.S. translates into an annual amortized capital cost of about \$500,000 U.S. But look at the inspiring pay-off. Parker has only half the staff turnover experienced by the rest of the Centura Health system. This means that, in their case, they do not have to recruit 50 employees to replace those who would depart in a typical hospital. At a replacement cost of \$50,000 U.S. for each healthcare specialist hired, this is the equivalent of a saving of \$2.5 million U.S. a year - a four-year payback on the additional capital costs alone - because people want to work in an inspiring place like Parker.

It is not just employees that are inspired by beautiful working environments - so are patients, suppliers and the community. Though Parker is still in its early days, they are able to report the lowest staff turnover rates and the highest patient and employee satisfaction scores in the entire, very successful Centura Health system. With its exceptional leadership, the investment made in the design of this facility will allow Parker to continue to earn an above average return because it uses its physical facilities to inspire and serve the needs of its patients, employees, suppliers and community

In September 2004, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released a report based on 600 studies that showed that design (physical surroundings, layout, sound and light) in hospitals plays a dramatic role in how fast and how well patients can recover from illness. People thrive in inspiring spaces and the investment necessary to achieve such a strong payback is remarkably modest. With nearly 25 billion dollars being allocated to building new healthcare facilities in the United States in 2005 - there is a huge opportunity to rethink design and create soul spaces that inspire.

We could all be so much more inspiring if we had the emotional courage to overcome our fear. Organizations would become more inspiring places in which to work if our leaders spoke the language of love and not fear. Labour-management relationships would be more inspiring, and reach more positive agreements, if we approached our labour disputes by considering shared needs - not egos or firmly-held positions. Our marriages and relationships would be more inspiring if we embraced them as durable, uplifting and sacred gifts, knowing that love grows and marriages endure when both parties are committed to inspiring each other every day.

The growing level of fear that now characterizes our lives has led to an epidemic loss of personal inspiration and a widespread sense of personal sadness. We see a culture of fear in our entertainment, sports and news industries. The creators of movies, video games, popular music, television programs, books, magazines and newspapers are very aware of this and choose images and language that support our addiction, misguided fascination and global numbness to fear. While these choices may improve bottom lines, they do nothing to inspire us or make the world a better place.

Our spiritual, emotional and physical wellness would grow in a world that was more aware of the impact of language and content in our day-to-day communications, relationships and transactions. The toxicity of violence and fear would be replaced with inspiration. This is why small budget films that encourage understanding, love and joy, like Bend it like Beckham, Whale Rider or My Big Fat Greek Wedding, touch the hearts of such wide audiences. But unfortunately such films are still the exception rather than the rule.

Fear has seeped into the lives of us all, whether we admit it or not. These are times in which fear stalks and grips us, distracting our attention from tasks and people, and therefore reducing our mastery and effectiveness as humans. In part, this fear is engendered by the shocks of institutional failure - corporate CEOs, priests, banks, doctors, teachers, politicians, police - we feel betrayed. And when we learn not to trust institutions - that which is outside of us - we turn to the only place left - that which is inside of us - the source of inspiration.

This is good news, because when we go inside, even if the territory might be unfamiliar to some, this is the place where our capacity to love and therefore inspire resides. Being inspired and optimistic is one thing; trying to inspire or be inspired while gripped in or causing fear is another thing altogether. Carl Jung said, "Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens."

We have two choices: playing not to lose, a fear-based way of living; or playing to win, an attitude that overcomes fear with love and therefore inspires those we touch. We experience inspiration and inspire others when we live authentically and are aligned with a clear sense of our higher purpose and a commitment to building soulful relationships with all those whom we serve. It comes from choosing our words carefully, avoiding the language of violence and war which sickens us instead of inspiring us.

We all have the capacity to inspire - if we choose to - but it is more about being inspiring than it is about telling others to be inspiring. As Albert Einstein said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."

Lance Secretan, a Toronto-based organizational strategist and leadership advisor is the author of Inspire! What Great Leaders Do (John Wiley and Sons) Here is his own Why/Be/Do - Destiny: To help create a more sustainable and loving planet; Cause: To inspire others to honour the sacredness in all relationships; Calling: To lead and serve through my writing, teaching and speaking.

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