Current Issue

Archives

Editorial Info

Search

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Icons and Values: Communicating Ethical Leadership

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Abstract
Experienced reality can be described as a simultaneous convergence of rational, emotional, and spiritual interests, and ethics as the translation of that reality into behavior. The results of an important new study of leadership ethics by Linda Trevino, Michael Brown, and Laura Hartman confirm that description of ethics. They discovered that major executives and ethics officers perceive leaders as ethical when (rational) profit-making objectives coincide with (emotional) personal welfare and with (spiritual) long-term horizons. Here, the results of that empirical survey are interpreted with respect to an inclusive appreciation of ethical decision-making and ethical communication. That interpretation points to the need to communicate participation in sacrifice, especially when others are confronted with a loss of profit or employment.

How is ethical leadership communicated? Inherent to that question is another. What is ethical leadership? Is it like the Loch Ness Monster—something everyone talks about, but no one has seen? Or, is it something recognized and discussed in reaction to a perceived failure? Taking a more positive perspective, we will attempt to identify the components of ethical leadership, i.e., what people expect of ethical leaders and what they perceive to be ethical leadership.

Practically, that expectation is threefold. Grounded in concrete experience, it identifies expectations and clarifies perceptions with respect to 1) attentiveness to the rational objectives of the organization; 2) sensitivity to the emotional concerns of people within and without the organization; and 3) sensibility to the spiritual implications of both for the big picture and the long term. The absence of either of these reflects failure in ethical leadership or in communicating ethical leadership.

Empirically, that same three-fold expectation has surfaced in a recent study of ethics officers and senior executives of several large corporations. Common to both is an appreciation of ethical leadership as a convergence of confidence and humility in decision-making and decision-communicating. The ethical leader communicates not only the decision, but also the benefits and costs attached to the decision for one's self as well as for others. That is, the ethical leader expresses a willingness to suffer the consequences of a decision.

Writing for *USA Today,* Walter Shapiro noted President George W. Bush's uneasiness as he addressed the nation in support of limited stem-cell research. "There were moments when it seemed even as Bush's eyes darted from line to line of the speech in the teleprompter," claims Shapiro, "that the president was having a debate with himself, and the outcome of that internal wrestling was still up for grabs" (2001, A6). That simple reflection of anxiety marked a departure from the firm, detached conviction of Mr. Bush's other policy statements, and revealed him as expressing "both the self-confidence and the humility to dare show

the nation a leader on the cusp of both moral and scientific uncertainty" (Shapiro, 2001, A6).

Mr. Bush's decision was long awaited by the American people. They had become aware of the costs and benefits of stem-cell research through print and broadcast journalism interviewing and quoting professional opinion from scientific, political, and moral experts. Mr. Bush obviously attended to their insights, and also studied the principles informing their respective philosophical, legal, or religious perspectives. In the final analysis, though, he formulated his own decision, and revealed himself as an ethical leader.

That judgment does not rest on his wide-ranging consultation and consideration of alternatives; instead it rests on Mr. Bush's communication of his own vulnerability and anxiety, and expression of the personal and professional costs he would suffer because of his decision. As Mr. Bush's decision continues to be discussed in the public forum, it is significant to note that no one is questioning his personal and professional integrity.

What Mr. Bush communicated is an appreciation of ethical leadership as the intersection of confidence and humility--a certain confidence arising from consideration of the consequences of every conceivable alternative, and a certain humility arising from the realization that he, too, would suffer the consequences of his decision. Rather than appealing to scientific principles, or to emotional principles, or to religious principles, he appealed to all three, and communicated a decision involving a convergence of all three. That intersection of confidence and humility also reflects the futility of advocating a single abstract principle with claim to universal appeal for distinguishing good and evil.

Rational, Emotional, and Spiritual Convergence

Ethical distinctions of good and evil are often based in philosophical, religious, or legal precepts. Imposed upon us from external sources, we are to adopt them for ourselves and use them to establish our relationships with others and with nature. In an ultimate sense, these many precepts reflect a single underlying principle with claim to universal acceptance. That is, the many ethical directives can be reduced to a single defining principle, and the intelligent, insightful person would be able to recognize it when present. We appeal, then, to an all-encompassing rule of love for others and define evil as a violation of that universal love. The more philosophically sophisticated might appeal to Emmanuel Kant's "categorical imperative" or John Stuart Mill's "utilitarian" perspective.

Joseph L. Badaracco, however, discovers a basic fallacy in this approach to ethics. It assumes an appreciation of the person as mechanistic. He explains that "philosophers sought to find an overarching, rational justification for morality—a set of basic principles that were independent of religion, tradition, culture, or individual beliefs" (Badaracco, 35). However, what they really discovered was a "morality machine" which set the one fundamental ethical principle "at the end of a conveyor belt, and people could feed their problems into it. After a period of clanking and chugging, the machine would apply the fundamental principle to the problems and then given answers" (Badaracco, 35).

For Badaracco, we, as persons, and our ethical decision-making, are much more complex than that mechanistic approach reflects. What he is really suggesting is an altogether different perspective from which to identify ourselves and our ethics. Rather than conforming to externally-imposed precepts, he recommends an appeal to internally-generated values. That is, we begin with ourselves, and with the values we have received and internalized from the whole of our experiences. Among these are the rational values learned in formal and informal educational situations, the emotional values derived from relationships with family and friends, and the spiritual values preached from pulpits and gleaned from religious texts or self-help books.

Badaracco also suggests that, even if we were to ascribe to universal and objective principles, we filter them through our own experience-generated values, and interpret them for ourselves. While we might all agree that taking another's life is universally and objectively evil, we would certainly qualify that principle for ourselves and interpret it differently with respect to self-defense, abortion, capital punishment, or euthanasia. Even objective moral principles will be interpreted in subjective terms.

It is for those reasons that Badaracco proposes that we broaden our appreciation of ethical principles to include "religion, tradition, culture, or individual beliefs" as well as philosophical speculation. That perspective appeals to a broader and more inclusive appreciation of ourselves and of our ethics. It also appeals to a direct communication of our ethics in speech and action.

Every time we venture to communicate in any fashion in this technologically-driven society, we are expressing ourselves and our values. Consistent with our very identities of ourselves as persons, and with the ways in which we perceive ourselves in relation to everything and everyone external to us, are the values anchoring our distinctions between right and wrong. Both reflect rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. In effect, we become images and icons of our own motives and objectives, wants and needs, beliefs and aspirations.

There are other icons and images within our experience which appeal to us, entice us, and inspire us precisely because they express spiritual and emotional values as well as rational values. Our Lady of Quadalupe appears everywhere in Mexico—dashboards of public taxicabs and private automobiles, homes and public buildings, inexpensive key rings and finely worked jewelry, ordinary drinking glasses and fancy ceramic dishes. As the story goes, shortly after the conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century, Mary the Mother of Jesus appears to the indigenous Nahua Juan Diego at Tepeyac near present-day Mexico City. She instructs him to cut roses from nearby bushes, gather them into his cloak, and present them as gifts to the Spanish bishop. When he does, the roses fall to the floor and her image remains miraculously inscribed on the cloak.

Describing the significance of this event, the biblical theologian Jean-Pierre Ruiz notes that the story and its image reflect a convergence of pre-Christian and Christian religious imagery (1999,106). The place itself, Tepayac, was originally associated with the Nahua goddess Tonantzin who, like Juan Diego's Mary, was often depicted as "dressed in a particular type of tunic, wore a mantel" and "was frequently said to be pregnant or to be carrying a small child on her back or arms" (Ruiz, 112).

In religious imagery, these details are associated with the divine, and with the divine attributes of transcendence and infinity. They are icons of a dimension often ascribed to imagination and fantasy, but also often ascribed to experience and reality. In the words of the sociologist and novelist Andrew M. Greeley, they refer to a "religious sensibility…that explain what human life means, with deep and powerful appeal to the total person" (1994, 38). For the psychologist Abraham H. Malsow, religious experience serves as an antidote to the exaggerated notion that human experience, knowledge, and meaning can be reduced to reason and to the conclusions of scientific investigation (1970, vii-xi). For the historian of religions, Joseph Campbell, the appeal to transcendence and infinity broadens and enlarges perspective, for "there are no horizons in space, and there can be no horizons in our own experience." They suggest that "we cannot hold onto ourselves and our in-groups as we once did" (Kennedy, 1979, 2).

However, even with the similarities between Tonantzin and the Virgin of Quadalupe, there are significant differences. While Tonantzin "was connected in myth to the serpent high god," Our Lady of Quadalupe is connected in the Christian scriptures to the serpent as the embodiment of evil, lying crushed at her feet as depicted in chapter twelve of the Book of Revelation (Ruiz, 112). Orlando Espin explains that "Juan Diego's Mary assumes the symbols that are useful for Christianity but rejects those that could identify her with the old religion [Nahua religion] or that appear to at least condone it." He also explains that "in so doing, the Virgin of Guadalupe followed a long history of Christian appropriation and use of symbols from newly converted peoples" (Ruiz, 112).

To be sure, there is something about this image of Our Lady of Guadalupe which communicates rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. There is also something about this image which appeals to us emotionally and spiritually, and perhaps even rationally. The problem, however, is that we limit our perspectives and interpretations of the external world to one or other of these dimensions, failing to grasp the integrated unity of the whole. The problem, too, is that we limit ourselves to rational, emotional, or spiritual interpretations of our own self-perceptions and of our own ethics, and communicate inadequate and partial ethical perspectives.

Religious Icons: Ethical Persons

The contemporary painter, J. Michael Walker, carries the appropriation of symbols from Christian and Nahua religions even further. He takes those elements of iconography associated with Our Lady of Quadalupe and attaches them to familiar women in familiar situations. His mother-in-law is dressed in the Virgin's distinctive blue mantel with a starry crown resting on her head. She is reading a letter from her faraway son as a cherub leans over her left shoulder and a money order lies on the table before her. Another woman, attired with the same mantel and crown, draws back the curtain to reveal the departing moon and dawning sun of a new day. Walker's women are not only contemporary, but also Mexican. They are represented with indigenous colors and features having universal appeal to a mother's compassion for her children, and surrender to the needs of her family.

Finding himself in a remote Mexican village, Walker sees the image of Our Lady of Quadalupe everywhere he turns. He also sees kind, compassionate people, especially women, surrendering to their husbands and children, dutifully pursuing the chores required of everyday life in a village without either indoor plumbing or electricity. Meditating on an image of our Lady of Quadalupe, he imaginatively and literally begins to draw a convergence of the heavenly mother with the earthly mothers.

That convergence of heaven and earth, of the miraculous with the ordinary, of Mary the mother of Jesus and the many Marias who are mothers of so many children reflects a conjunction of values. The spiritual values of infinity and transcendence join the emotional values of compassion and surrender to forge an intimate union to which meaning is ascribed. The two cannot be divorced from one another. Nor can they be relegated to separate realms of activity, especially with respect to experience and values continuous with that experience.

In an interview with Joseph Campbell, another psychologist, Eugene Kennedy, questions the commonly held division between the sacred and the profane: "If heaven and earth were divided, so too were body and soul, nature and supernature, flesh and spirit" (1979, 1). Campbell, in turn, repudiates that duality:

That divided model allowed us to think that there was a spiritual order, separate or divided from our own experience…With the moonwalk, the religious myth that sustained these notions could no longer be held. With our view of earthrise, we could see that the earth and the heavens were no longer divided but that the earth is in the heavens. There is no division and all the theological notions based on the distinction between the heavens and the earth collapse with that realization. There is a unity in the universe and in our own experience. We can no longer look for a spiritual order outside of our own experience (Kennedy, 1979, 1).

Campbell rejects any duality and argues for an intimate union of all of experience. It is that union Walker depicts in his paintings of Our Lady of Quadalupe. He does not want to reduce the infinite and the transcendent to the common and the ordinary; nor does he want to lift the mundane up to heavenly heights. He wants to forge an integrated convergence of the two, and envisions spiritual attributes as integrated with emotional attributes in every dimension of human experience.

Notably absent from Walker's paintings is any reflection of the values of wealth and status so important to the American Dream and its realization through business. In fact, his images of Our Lady of Quadalupe reflect an aversion to those values and to the whole business enterprise. They suggest that meaning can be ascribed only to the conjunction of the spiritual and emotional values of the poor women of Mexico. Their poverty and anonymity provide the context or condition for the conjunction of those values.

For Walker, this conjunction of values is ascribed to experience, knowledge, and meaning. Moreover, this conjunction of values represents moral and ethical goodness. Conversely, the exclusion of the values of wealth and status represent them as morally and ethically evil. The implication is that the American Dream is, of itself, intrinsically evil.

Tim Kasser and Richard M. Ryan offer an alternative perspective. They conclude from their research that the American Dream is driven primarily towards "obtaining contingent external approval and rewards: financial success (money), social recognition (fame), and an appealing appearance (image)…" (1996, 280).

Combined, these three values are associated with success and ascribe personal validity and self-worth to power. Because these values are so individualistic, and because they can be measured scientifically, we refer to them as rational values. These rational values, claim Kasser and Ryan, "do not provide satisfaction in and of themselves" (1996, 280). Rather, "their allure usually lies in the presumed admiration that attends them or in the power and sense of worth that can be derived from attending them" (1996. 280).

However, their research also concludes that the American Dream refers to another set of values. Of a "largely intrinsic character" they are: "affiliation (relatedness), community feeling (helpfulness), physical fitness (health), and self-acceptance (growth)…"(1996, 280-81). Combined, these four values are associated with happiness and attribute personal validity and self-worth to intimate relationships and communal interactions. They conclude that "having a high importance on intrinsic aspirations was associated with significantly more self-actualization and vitality and with significantly less depression…" (1996, 281).

Conversely, Kasser and Ryan conclude that "the relative importance of extrinsic aspirations was associated with significantly less self-actualization and vitality…" (1996, 281). In effect, they are proving Walker correct in his rejection of the values of wealth and distinction. That is especially the case when meaning is attributed to self-actualization and vitality.

Notably absent from the Kasser and Ryan studies is any reference to the spiritual values of transcendence and infinity. Unlike Walker, they are not interested in images which reflect a convergence of spiritual and emotional values. Actually, neither are they interested in a convergence of rational and emotional values. They are primarily concerned with examining how pursuit of either of these two sets of values affects self-actualization and vitality.

They are also, however, pointing to a distinction between the experience of Mexican and American women. The Mexican women he depicts are removed from the experience of business, and from its inherent values of wealth and distinction. American women are not.

There is, however, an American woman who has recently become an icon of the conjunction of the emotional values of compassion and surrender and the rational values of wealth and distinction. Erin Brockovich is concerned about feeding and clothing her children (Soderberg, 2000). A single mother, she doggedly pursues employment, landing a menial job as a file clerk for a small law firm. She accidentally discovers an industrial cover-up endangering the lives of parents and children. Because of water contaminated by a chemical processing plant, people are dying from unusual illnesses. Erin convinces her boss to pursue an investigation, and the two of them become passionately committed to the cause.

Driven by compassion, she surrenders her personal life, and dedicates her time and energy towards procuring monetary compensation for the people affected by the contaminated drinking water. In the end, her persistence pays off, and she is awarded with money and status for herself—the rational values attached to individual success. She is also rewarded with the self-actualization achieved through the pursuit of relatedness, helpfulness, physical fitness, health, and growth—the emotional values attached to happiness.

In this conjunction of the rational and emotional virtues Erin Brockovich represents moral and ethical goodness. That goodness differs from the goodness of J. Michael Walker's Mexican women, and actually places the two in diametrical opposition. The first is grounded in the conjunction of rational and emotional values and the second in the conjunction of spiritual and emotional values. That difference in values can be ascribed to a difference of experience. The world of the Mexican women is both remote and rural. They have not been affected by either industrial or information technology. The world of Erin Brockovich is immediate and urban.

Transposed into Erin's world, as many immigrant women have been, would Walker attribute the spiritual values of transcendence and infinity to them? Would he paint Erin Brockovich with Mary's starry crown and blue mantle? We would, because in an indirect way, her experience, knowledge, and values represent the values of infinity and transcendence. She transcends her immediate care for her children. In an especially revealing scene from the movie, her own children confront her frequent absences from them. Her

responses resonate with single women throughout corporate America in similar predicaments: "You don't want Mommy to be good at her job?" "I'm doing this for us." "I know it's hard for you to understand." "It's not like I miss dinner all the time; we ate together last night" (Soderberg, 2000).

She transcends her own job description. She could have easily filed away the memorandum which inspired her dogged pursuit of injustice. She could have easily ignored the injustices it described and provided rational excuses for doing so. However, she freely chooses to transcend her own immediate comfort and her own immediate familial responsibilities for the pain of being fired by an unsympathetic boss, for the death threats from the chemical plant, for the rejection by fearful parents. She is also driven by an attunement to infinity, a pressing realization that her suffering is universal and inclusive. It has no boundaries. Throughout her world of the United States and the greater world beyond national and ethnic boundaries, men, women, and children are suffering because of unbridled selfishness and greed.

The limiting horizons repudiated by Joseph Campbell cannot be attributed to Erin Brockovich. Neither can the pursuit of spiritual values as antidotes to the rational values to which Abraham Maslow refers. She is Andrew Greeley's "total person." For Erin Brockovich goodness is ascribed to a conjunction of rational, emotional, and spiritual values.

In this sense, she is a "religious" person. As the theologian Peter Gardella explains, the word religion combines the prefix for "repetition" with the Latin word *ligare*, "to bind" as a ligament binds (1998, 1). For him "*religion* is a system of nonrational commitments that hold life together" (1998, 2). Antithetical to religion is the pursuit of life from a rational perspective, i.e., "calculating the costs and benefits of their commitments according to some philosophy" (Gardella, 2). Also antithetical to religion is any kind of myopic spiritual or emotional selfishness and greed. For the religious person, however, it is the inclusive, comprehensive "power of certain ideas, words, names, places, actions, symbols, and stories" that "gives shape to the world" (Gardella, 2). It is these many experiences that inform human knowledge and values. Anything less is not religion, leading to the conclusion that, when institutional religions fail to actualize this inclusive perspective, they fail to be religious. Gardella claims that before assuming form in rational and logical proposition, i.e., before reason (unrational), "some commitments seem worthy of respect that extends to sacrifice" (1998, 2).

Erin Brockovich's commitment extends to suffering, and that suffering identifies her as a religious person. She suffers precisely because she transcends the rational boundaries of time and place, and the emotional boundaries of compassion and surrender to those of her immediate experience. However, she does not attribute her commitment to religious inspiration, and there is no need for her to do so. In Gardella's definition of religion, there is no need for explicit awareness: "Every day, not only in churches and temples, but also in homes and offices, gymnasiums and restaurants, people live according to nonrational [religious] systems of values, rituals, symbols and myths," and do so without direct acknowledgment (1998, 2).

Goodness, then, especially as attributed to this appreciation of religion, cannot be assessed simply in rational, or emotional, or spiritual terms. It can be assessed only with respect to an integrated conjunction of all three, and with respect to the simultaneous pursuit of the values attributed to each: the wealth and status of the rational, the compassion and surrender of the emotional, the transcendence and infinity of the spiritual.

Corporate Icons: Ethical Leaders

On the basis of these observations, we can identify several theoretical assumptions from which arise several practical questions for ethical communication. Ethics is not simply a matter of obedience to prepositional norms or abstract principles. It is a matter of personal identity, flowing from and expressive of the person's very being. It is also a matter of one's priorities, and of the driving and motivating forces underlying behavior. Moreover, ethics is revealed and communicated in both speech and action. It cannot be contained within the realm of thought alone. How, then, do we know whether someone is an ethical person? On what basis do we assess someone as ethical or unethical? How does the ethical person communicate ethics, whether individually or corporately?

Linda Trevino, Michael Brown, and Laura Pincus Hartman asked those same questions with respect to leaders. However, the results of their study need not be applied exclusively to those in leadership positions. They can be applied to everyone, and to anyone in a leadership role. Among their concerns is a distinction between "intentional and unintentional" ethical leadership, and the need to communicate the unintentional in intentional terms (Trevino, et al. 2001b, 10; Trevino, 2001a, 134-5, 139).

They prefaced their important study of ethical leadership with R.G. Lord's and K.J. Maher's definition of leadership as "the process of being perceived by others as a leader," and extended that definition to include an ethical dimension of executive leadership. They also noted that because most senior executives in large organizations do not have face-to-face interactions with employees other than the top management team, perceptions of ethical leadership must come indirectly from images, symbolic behavior, policies and communications (Trevino, 2001b, 24) Inherent to perception, then, is a subjectivity of individual particularity resulting in equally subjective interpretations. Leaders are described as icons, and their behavior representative of their values. However, as icons, their behavior is assessed as ethical or unethical on the basis of subjective interpretation.

To understand how ethical leadership is perceived, Trevino, Brown and Hartman interviewed senior executives and ethics officers of twenty large American companies. Both were asked to think about an (unidentified) ethical leader from their experience as a point of reference. The objective of the study was threefold: to identify executive ethical leadership, the behavioral traits associated with ethical leadership, and the ethical leader's motivation and vision for the future of the organization.

Ethical leaders are "perceived to be **people-focused** first and foremost." That is, they reflect the concerns and interests described with respect to the values of surrender and compassion for others. They respect people, and develop and mentor people. They are also focused "on **the interests of multiple stakeholders**, including the **community and society**." Unethical leaders are perceived "to be more **self-centered** and **less caring about people**" (Trevino, 2001a, 132; Trevino, 2001b, 14-16) Important to them are the emotional values Kasser and Ryan ascribe to happiness, and to personal validity and self-worth experienced in intimate relationships and communal interaction.

From the rational perspective, especially with respect to measurable objectives and standards, ethical leaders are perceived to "care a great deal about **bottom-line success**, and also concerned with the **means** as well as the ends, "conscious of what they are doing and how they are doing it" (Trevino, 2001b, 16) In Ryan's and Kasser's terms, they represent the values associated with success, i.e., the money, fame, and image attending positions of power.

From the spiritual perspective, they are concerned "about the **long-term**." Unethical leaders are differentiated from ethical leaders "in terms of their **short-term focus on the financial bottom line"** at any cost, "driven to gain the bottom line no matter what" (Trevino, 2001b, 16-17). That long-term focus is analogous to the spiritual values of transcendence and infinity insofar as it represents a motivating drive to move beyond established boundaries and to set one's sights beyond expected limitations of time and place.

Important for leadership ethics is the perception of integration, and the manner in which it is communicated in speech and action. Trevino, Brown, and Hartman conclude that ethical leaders are perceived "as **role models** who lead by example and who **walk the talk.**" They do so by **creating and institutionalizing values** in the organization, and by using **"rewards and punishments** to hold people **accountable to standards**." They do not tolerate **ethical lapses**; they "make sure that unethical conduct is followed **by discipline**." They are perceived as "**doing the right thing**." That is, they are perceived as "**honest, trustworthy, people of integrity**" (Trevino, 2001b, 14-15)

In this listing of virtues, honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity appear practically synonymous. They also appear to be idealistic abstractions removed from concrete persons. Yet, from what we have seen, these abstractions are attributed with practical implications communicated in speech and action. The question, then, becomes that of ascertaining the antecedents to honesty, trust, and integrity. What lies behind them? With respect to leadership ethics, the answer is clear: all of the above. It enlists the values we have ascribed to the rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human experience, and also to the practical expectations attached to them.

Attached to the rational dimension is the ethical expectation that clear objectives are envisioned and that standards are established to ensure their realization. It also means that digressions from those standards are punished rather than rewarded. Success becomes not only a corporate objective, but also an ethical objective. However, it is not the only objective, though leaders are often perceived as being totally absorbed by measurable production quotas, market share, or dividends.

That rational dimension is not pursued exclusive of the emotional dimension. Sensitive to that dimension, the ethical leader is genuinely concerned about people within the firm, but also about everyone who has a stake in the firm, even the community in which the firm resides and the greater society within which it operates. Yet, physically isolated from everyone but a few senior executives, the leader can be easily perceived as emotionally isolated as well. Happiness, too, becomes not only a corporate objective, but also an ethical objective.

The spiritual dimension requires that profits be maximized in both the short term and the long term. The implication is that short-term objectives are appreciated within a long-term perspective. When short-term earnings fail, and employees are laid off, it is difficult to perceive the leader as focused on the long-term, or, for that matter, on the needs and concerns of people. This appeal to transcendence and infinity represents the values of the spiritual dimension.

Honesty, trust, and integrity then refer not simply to telling the truth or disclosing salient information, but to the intersection of the values of the rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions within the ethical leader. More so, these words represent the communication of that internal intersection in an external intersection. That is, “walking the talk” requires a continuum of thought, speech, and action in which the values of all three dimensions are communicated simultaneously and consistently.

It is that simultaneity and consistency which grounds ethical perception, and determines whether anyone will be perceived as ethical or unethical. Failing to meet any of the expectations ascribed to the integrated or religious perspective, the leader will be perceived as unethical. Is there any way to prevent that from happening?

Earlier, when referring to Lord’s and Marsh’s definition of leadership, the word “process” was used with respect to perception suggesting that perception is neither static nor comprehensive. The strong implication is that there exists a dynamic fluidity to ethical perception, reflecting a driving momentum towards integration expressed in thought, speech, and action. It also means that this momentum is communicated. Seriously attending to this integration as a process moving towards fulfillment would be more important for perception than direct references to particular ethical expectations.

Yet, one would want to draw these particular expectations into one’s perspective on the levels of thought, speech, and action, and incorporate them into any process of decision-making. Ethical communication would then become more a matter of recognizing the threefold consistency of thought, speech, and, action in dynamic process rather than ascribing to a checklist of ethical values and virtues. It would also become a matter of directing one’s attention to the three-fold implications of rational, emotional, and spiritual expectations. The business ethicist Michael Boylan uses the expression “integrated worldview” to express this perspective, and also to underscore the need to communicate it directly and explicitly (2001, 6).

From another point of view, subjective perceptions designating someone as an unethical leader may represent a failure to communicate one’s integrated perspective from thought into speech and action. Assuming that everything one says or does reveals something about the person, ethical leadership becomes a matter of accurately communicating one’s integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty. This is where the rubber meets the road, and where ethics meets perception. It is often the case that the leader takes ethics for granted, and assumes that others are aware of his integrity, trustworthiness, and honesty.

Practically, the leader assumes an ethical perspective underlying strategic policies and critical decision-making, and also assumes that everyone “knows” this to be the case. As Trevino, Brown, and Hartman note that assumption is false, for “in large corporations, an executive must not assume that his or her message is

being heard by lower level employees" (Trevino, 2001b, 18). Given the leader's isolated distance from, and absence of face-to-face interaction with, many people, how would anyone know that ethical considerations enter into strategic policies or critical decisions? Only when the implicit becomes explicit would they know. Only when ethical values are clearly communicated can the leader be perceived as ethical.

Opportunities and Ethics

To express this threefold appreciation for rational, emotional, and spiritual integration in the language of business and business ethics, we translate the growing popularity of the notion of sustainability and its insistence on a "triple bottom line" into economic terms. As often described, sustainability reflects an appeal to the infinite and the transcendent, as well as sacrifice. It urges us to venture beyond our preoccupation with the moment and with ourselves to provide for future generations. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development recognizes that, although "there are over 100 definitions of sustainability," they all agree that "development is sustainable where 'it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'" (World Council for Sustainable Development, 2000).

Sustainability enters directly into business and economic profit maximization by proposing an extended "triple bottom line." "Sustainable development involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity" and recommends that "companies aiming for sustainability need to perform not against a single, financial bottom line but against the triple bottom line"(World Council for Sustainable Development, 2000). The rational interests of economic profit are to be extended to include the emotional interests of people and the ecology. Inherent to this description is the further implication that, extended into the future and into a global perspective, a spiritual dimension is also incorporated. To assess good and evil, we appeal to the threefold values attached to the rational, emotional, and spiritual dimensions which inform human integrity.

That appeal can be grounded in the ethical implications inherent to the economic principle of opportunity costs. More familiar with fixed costs and variable costs, men and women in business ignore or avoid direct appeals to the significance of opportunity costs and their implications for fixed and variable costs, and, eventually, for profit maximization. Inherent to the principle of opportunity costs is recognition of the scarcity of resources and also of the need to use them as efficiently as possible. This requires an investigation into all available alternatives, and an acknowledgment that the pursuit of one implies rejection of the others. Attached to that rejection are indirect costs which enter into the calculations of fixed and variable costs.

Translating these implications into ethics, three are of practical importance. First, we can describe the identification of alternatives with respect to opportunities. Then, we can assess the opportunities available to us with respect to gains and losses, and, at the same time, appreciate that inherent to the gains awarded to the pursuit of one opportunity are the losses attached to the rejection of others. The choice of one opportunity implies the rejection of others, and there are always costs attached to the rejected opportunities.

These dynamics can be applied to sustainability's triple bottom line perspective, especially in communicating ethics. When the leader speaks about laying people off to realize short-term quarter earnings, listeners readily perceive that these rational interests are of paramount importance. They also perceive that spiritual long-term interests and emotional personal interests are not. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the leader is perceived as unethical precisely because these concerns are ignored or avoided. This may not mean that they are unimportant to the leader. In fact, they may be, but in failing to address them explicitly, the leader is perceived as concerned only with maximizing bottom-line profits and unconcerned about the long-term implications of job security and human compassion. The failure to communicate implicit ethical values translates into a missed opportunity, and to costs attached to it.

These costs may not be directly or immediately apparent, but they do exist, and take shape and form with respect to a mitigation of corporate morale and loyalty symptomatic of questionable job security and dissatisfaction. Returning to Gardella's description of religion, we can readily draw an analogy between religious suffering and economic opportunity costs; inherent to both is loss. Communicating that loss is just

as important as communicating the benefits ascribed to any decision. To communicate ethics, the leader would assume the dual role of Janus who, in the Roman world, was placed at the threshold to preside over those entering and leaving the establishment.

Trevino, Brown, and Hartman conclude that, because **ethics is a top down phenomenon** (Trevino, 2001b, 17), actually communicating integrated, religious, or triple bottom-line ethics is important not only for perceptions of ethical leadership, but also for perceptions of an ethical corporation. Their conclusions reflect the rational, emotional, and spiritual determinants of interpretation as well as the fusion of the three into the integrated or religious perspective we described earlier. In other words, the corporate executives and officers they surveyed express a certain appreciation of reality, and also confirm Max DePree's contention that "the first task of the leader is to define reality" (DePree, 1989, 11).

In a corporate context, that reality can be easily limited to the task at hand—to make money. As important as that is, Trevino, Brown, and Hartman have discovered that how that objective is realized is as important as the objective itself. Whether intentionally or unintentionally the leader communicates not only a definition of reality, but also the values attached to that definition. To the extent those values are communicated directly and consciously the leader will be perceived as ethical.

Perceptions of reality, however, cannot be confined to reason and to the motives and objectives of rational cause-and-effect, and the demands of production and profit maximization. Perceptions of reality include emotional wants and needs, i.e., the kinds of values described by Kasser and Ryan referring to relational interaction. Perceptions of reality also include spiritual beliefs and aspirations. Integrity, then, becomes more than simply a matter of telling the truth, but of interpreting reality from all three perspectives. It also becomes a matter of communicating all three dimensions of reality, and, at all costs, doing everything in one's power to appeal to all three in speech and action.

Combining DePree's appreciation of leadership with respect to reality and Gardella's understanding of religion with respect to an integrated whole, ethical communication becomes most readily perceived when personal sacrifice is expressed. Inherent in sustainability's triple bottom line and in opportunity cost's benefits and costs is an appreciation of sacrificing someone or something for the good of the whole. The leader participates in that sacrifice, and communicates that participation in speech and action, is perceived as an ethical leader.

When dividends are low, or when people are laid off, the senior officer whose bonus is increased cannot be perceived as an ethical leader. Failing to participate directly in the sacrifice of others, the leader cannot be perceived as a person of integrity. In that one action, the leader reflects a commitment to individual wealth and status and an absence of compassion and surrender, and also of transcendence and infinity. That lack of concern for others and for the long-term viability of the company is broadcast loudly and clearly to all stakeholders who immediately perceive a lack of integrity and a lack of ethics.

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Back to Top
Home | Current Issue | Archives | Editorial Information | Search | Interact