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IV. NEW FORMATS

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Reflections on Leadership: Conversations with Warren Bennis and Richard Kilburg

Transcribed and adapted by
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The following are adaptations from two individual interviews conducted by host Dr. George Watts on the radio show *The Business Doctor*, of Chicago's WCPT 850 AM. The first, an interview with Dr. Warren Bennis, aired on Sunday, January 15th, 2006. The second interview with Dr. Richard Kilburg aired October 1st, 2006. Both psychologists have dedicated their careers to the study of leadership. Their commentaries cover a broad base of the historical and current themes of leadership, including past and present leadership styles, our biological need for leadership, and its origins and failures.

Warren Bennis on Leadership

Dr. Warren Bennis, well-known management consultant and recognized expert on the subject of leadership, has revolutionized how we think about leadership and management in today's society. Currently Distinguished Professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California and founding chairman of The USC Leadership Institute, he has served on the faculty of Harvard and Boston Universities, as Provost and Executive VP of the State

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University of New York at Buffalo, and as President of the University of Cincinnati. He succeeded Douglas McGregor as chairman of the Organization Studies department at MIT.

His extraordinary understanding of leadership and remarkable contributions to the field have attracted the attention of people in power, and he has served as advisor to four US presidents and consulted with a host of Fortune 500 companies. But Bennis also conveys his ideas to thousands of people across the globe through his prolific writing. His best known publications include *On Becoming a Leader*, *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, and *The Unreality Industry*, co-authored by Ian Mitroff.

In the following adaptation from a radio interview broadcast last year, Dr. Bennis discusses a few of the basic themes from a book coauthored with Robert Townsend, *Reinventing leadership: Strategies to empower the organization* (1995). With a host of colorful and accessible examples, he describes his ideas about how an organization's structure and culture will determine its success in future years, and reflects upon what it means to be an exemplary person and exemplary leader.

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Watts: Can you please explain what you mean by transitioning from the old style of leadership to the new one?

Bennis: There are two aspects of the old style of leadership that I think are worth underlining. One has to do with the general idea that there is a command and control orientation, sort of an old fashioned military model, that even the military doesn't use anymore. All wisdom and all knowledge emanate from the top. There's a strong, very rigid hierarchy which one reports to at every level.

Some of the big bureaucracies used to adhere to this model. I remember when I first talked to Jack Welch of GE about 15 years ago, there were 29 levels of a hierarchy. How can you ever get anything done with 29 levels of hierarchy if you have to be agile, speedy, responsible, flexible, and resilient? It just doesn't work.

So the first aspect of the old kind of model had to do with leadership at the top. All wisdom was deposited in the bank at the very top of the pyramid. That was basically the old-fashioned model which has lasted for centuries and centuries. Only recently have we seen the old star companies, like General Motors, have to really cut back in a most dramatic way because they can no longer operate within that model. Compare them to Google, which is flexible and dynamic. In Google, there are pods and pockets within the organization. There's no one man (sic) control; in fact, people can make decisions at every single level.

The other equally important thing is a mindset. This is perhaps even more critical. I think that in the old days—and by that I mean most of the time up to maybe the 1980s—there were two views of human nature. One was a view that people were slothful, lazy, needed to be pushed around, easily tricked, and

needed to be in effect manipulated if you were going to get any work out of them. That's what I would call the "Machine Model of Man."

The other mindset relates to the Growth Model—the idea that workers have the capacity to go way beyond what their formal degrees are if they are sufficiently involved in running the business, if they have some stake of ownership, if they feel empowered, and if they feel they are at the center, not the periphery of things.

I think these two mindsets still are alive and well today. It seems to me that the only companies that are going to be in the phone book by the year 2015 are those which recognize that hierarchies are obsolete. The ones around then will be the ones that get into the mindset that your only resource—your only inventory—walks home every night. And they're the people. I guess that's sort of an over simplified way of putting it, but I just want to put that on the table.

I don't believe that even organizations that appear to be military—and I'm thinking about the US military forces in Iraq, and about the military organizations I've been involved with and know about—are exempt. In fact, they sometimes lead the way into the different paradigm I'm talking about.

Watts: So, this is similar to the distinction between Theory X and Theory Y and trying to create conditions that make it easier for people to do their jobs...

Bennis: Exactly. It's interesting you bring it up. As you know, my mentor was a man named Doug McGregor who talked about Theory X and Theory Y. Also, the man that my book was cowritten with, Bob Townsend, was a great admirer of Doug McGregor's work. McGregor put it exactly that way: there are two modalities of thinking about human nature.

When you think about leadership, it's all about how you view the capacities, the capabilities, and the potential of the human being. McGregor was way ahead of his time because he was saying that you can, if you want to, operate with a model of man in which people need to be manipulated, need to be goaded, because they're basically lazy. You can use a model in which people are viewed as sort of objects that you manipulate like pieces of chess, like pawns—all you have to do is learn the right moves for them and they will move. Some leaders think this way about people.

But I think we all know that people really give the most to the organization when they feel they're being acknowledged—when they feel they have a capacity to develop—when they feel they have bosses who really care about their welfare—when they think they're in a system of trust. Those are the things that made up Theory Y.

The dark view of man, almost the satanic view of man, is one where it's a sort of a paranoid world, and you've got to set up defenses made of all sort of impenetrable ways of the bureaucracy which keep people from being

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fully human. That's what Theory X and Theory Y are all about. That's the difference.

Watts: In the book, what did you mean by the term "social architect"?

Bennis: That is the phrase I actually created to convey the idea that as a leader, among the most important things you can do is to create the kind of ecology of relationships where people can really be open and transparent. That is what I was getting at when I mentioned GM's 29 levels of hierarchy before. I don't see any formal hierarchies which are built on silos where one part doesn't communicate to another part. We've seen so many tragedies along these lines.

When one of the responsibilities of the leader is that he (sic) can't be everywhere all the time, he's got to create the kind of human organization, or social architecture, which has a cultural bias. And the bias has to do with being open. People have to be able to speak truth to power. There are enormous capacities to capitalize on synergies, on interdependence.

In this complicated world, we've got to get various elements within an organization to really start talking to one another and cross their boundaries. We've got to make it—as Jack Welch once put it—"boundaryless." We've got to make it so that you don't use these phony boundaries to create locks and walls that often go on between departments in an organization that should be talking with one another, but instead are not being honest with one another. That's what I meant by building the kind of social system, the kind of breathing organism, that will allow people to operate at their best.

To succeed in doing so means to be very aware of the social architecture of an organization. At the top, you can be a very humanistic leader, but unless your way of thinking about human institutions is mirrored and copied at every level of the organization, I don't think it's going to work. You can send out all sorts of edicts; you can make all sorts of decrees; you can even be a role model of how you want to be a more open, democratic organization. But unless the culture, unless the organizational arteries, represent and reflect those ideas, it's not going to get anywhere. That's what I meant.

Watts: In your book, you discuss the three traits—ambition, competence, and integrity—that define executive character. Can you define those and tell us why you think those traits are the legs of the tripod of leadership?

Bennis: If you look at three of the drivers that influence how leaders behave at every level of our organization, not just at the top, I think of it as a tripod. Three legs motivate and affect character and integrity. One of them is ambition. I think that most people in organizations have a certain degree of ambition. It's a necessary component. You've got to want to be a leader. I'm not just talking about leadership; I'm talking about how people live their lives. Whatever the goal of that ambition is, we all have it. It would be sad to think of a person who

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has no drive, who doesn't have any sort of mission in life. That's what ambition is based on. It has to do with achievement; it has to do with the capacity to go for something. Now that's one leg of the tripod.

Then there's competence. If you have an ambition that you want to be a research scientist, or a doctor who is going to oversee the development of a new medical device, or a CFO of an organization, then you really have to have an adequate degree of business literacy. That's what I'm calling competence. That's the second leg of the tripod.

The third leg, which I think is critical, is a moral compass—some sense of right and wrong. I think virtually all of us know right from wrong. There is a very strange group of people that are just plain psychopaths. They just do not know right from wrong. But I'm talking about the average person.

These three legs have to be in balance. If the ambition is so out of whack, so unbridled, absent competence and moral compass, you get the demagogue; you get a dictator. You get someone without any sense of a full human being. These are the despots; these are the people who are basically without a moral compass. Without that moral compass they will lead the world astray—as we've seen in the last century, especially.

If you just have competence without a moral compass or ambition, you get a "technocrat": a green eye-shaded pencil pusher who's only counting, and doesn't know the real value of anything, but only the monetary value of this or that. You get the sheer technocrat without any sense of moral purpose and without any sense of ambition.

I've never seen the person with the third leg minus the other two. People might say, "What about Mother Teresa?" But, she had a great deal of ambition and competence! Jimmy Carter had a great deal of ambition, some competence, and a big moral compass. When those three are in balance I think we have an integrated leader. When ambition supersedes competence and moral compass, we have evil in the world—competence without drive or integrity.

That's the tripod. Now to bring an end to this part of it, my bias about leadership in life is that the process of becoming a fully integrated person—where all of your talents are deployed, in an ethical way—is no different than the process of becoming a terrific leader. I really do believe that there is a similarity between a fully integrated person and what I would consider an exemplary leader.

One might argue, "Wasn't Hitler a terrific leader? Even though no one, at least no one in this country, agrees with his goals or his style? Or a Stalin, who murdered at least 30–40 million people? Or a Mao, who did this same kind of thing? Were they not effective leaders?"

Yes, I would say they were *effective* leaders, up to a point, but not what I would call *exemplary* or good leaders, because there was no moral compass there. Anyway, that's a very long way of it, but it gives you the essence about

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the balance of the moral compass, ambition, and competence. They have to be in balance, most of the time.

Watts: What did you mean by the "personal side" of leadership?

Bennis: The personal side of leadership relates to the capacity to engage people in a common pursuit. It is the capacity to be able to create in your organization, even if it's a small group, a collective definition of success. A collective definition of success is more than just having a vision. All organizations have vision cards and value statements. It's more about how you can create an agreement among every level of the organization that they're all in it together.

I'll give you an example. There's a movie director who has a history of very interesting films—Bob Zemeckis. His first big hit was *Back to the Future*; he's done the Tom Hanks film *Forrest Gump*, and he's done a lot of movies with Tom Hanks. He's a marvelous director, and when I asked him "How come Forrest Gump is such a terrific movie?" he said something which sounded kind of simple, but had a profound meaning. He said, "Well, we were all making the same movie." Organizations should get that metaphor through their heads, "we're all making the same movie." It was Zemeckis who created the story, the narrative. And he engaged people such that they realized that their fates were correlated.

Quite often organizations are quite complicated, so complicated that people are running off doing different things, even things where people get in the way of each other. I think the leader essentially is creating that force. When it really is about "making the same movie"—when everybody's excited about what they're doing, and when they're all involved in an interdependent way—nothing can stop them. They're unstoppable.

When you've been on a team like that it's great. So many people have never been in a hot group, where everybody's giving their best—each with a different talent—to create something that will realize their goal. You see this in sports teams. My own University, the University of Southern California, had, until the January 4th Rose Bowl Game, won 34 straight games. That team is still going to come back because they've got that sense. They had a taste of defeat, and with that taste of defeat they even became stronger.

Watts: When you think about the University of Southern California and football, you don't think about failure very much. But they did lose. That brings me to one of my final questions: What's the most important quality a leader needs to handle mistakes in a company?

Bennis: A leader has to have enough trust in all sorts of constituencies. First of all, you've got to really not be in denial about your mistakes. If you blew it, everybody knows it. You might as well come clean about it. When people make gross and visible mistakes these days in public leadership, it is public.

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Given this world of transparency, and blogging, you can no longer keep secrets or lie anymore. The public, the bloggers, and the people on the Internet are way ahead of you. Look at what happened recently to a company that makes bike locks. Someone pointed out in the blogs that you could actually pick one of their locks apart with a Bic pen. Lots of people knew about it. The company, at first, was in denial, and then they had to finally come clean.

You've got to realize, first of all, that in this world transparency is inevitable. If you blow it—unless there's a national security reason why you can't—then you better get there first with "We know this. We blew it; we knew it, and we're not going to do that again. We've learned from our mistakes. We're going to go on and we feel that our mistakes will tell us about the future."

Now, when you get into the really public, political domain, openly admitting your mistakes is even more important. It wasn't until this year and late last year that President Bush really began to admit his miscalculations concerning Iraq. His approval points went up by 5–10 points because he started talking truth.

So you learn from mistakes. You don't try to hide them, because you know you're not going to get away with it these days. It's an opportunity for your organization to learn. You blew it. You have to figure it out without playing the blame game, and instead look at yourself. I think a mistake for anybody in their career is a way they learn. Making mistakes is the best way we learn. We don't learn as much from winning and winning and winning.

Richard Kilburg on Leadership and Wisdom

Dr. Richard Kilburg is a clinical psychologist and Senior Director of the Office of Human Services at Johns Hopkins University. He was the founding president of The Society of Psychologists in Management and has been the recipient of numerous professional awards including SPIM's Distinguished Psychologist in Management Award. Dr. Kilburg has written widely on executive coaching, professional impairment, and other issues in management. He is also a Fellow of Division 13 of APA, the Society of Consulting Psychology.

Dr Kilburg shared his thoughts from his recent book *Executive Wisdom: Coaching and Emergence of Virtuous Leaders* (APA Books, 2006) in an October 2006 radio interview with SPIM Member George Watts on the Sunday morning "Business Doctor" program, WCPT 850-AM (live from Crystal Lake Chicago). The following material is adapted from that interview.

Watts: What is "executive wisdom?"

Kilburg: Executive wisdom is a special case of human wisdom. If you look through history, human beings, philosophers, psychologists, and theologians have been studying wisdom for thousands of years and there are many different definitions out there. In psychology, it's become a major field of study over

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about the last 20 years. In my opinion, the best scientific psychological definition currently available in the literature comes from a couple of German scientists, Paul Baltes and Ursula Staudinger, who have invented something called the Berlin Wisdom Model.

They define wisdom as "an expert system in the fundamental pragmatics of life." I've extended that definition to define executive wisdom as an expert system in the fundamental pragmatics of organized human life. When I'm teaching or coaching it, I simply tell people that it's the art of finding the right thing to do, doing it in the right way, and doing it against the right time frame. It's not just making the right decision.

Watts: Can you speak on the idea that human beings have a biological human need for leadership?

Kilburg: Psychologists and anthropologists who have studied primate behavior have had the most influence on my views. For example, human beings, being primates, are "troop animals." We humans are not that far out of the forest or the Savannah. We are only about 15,000 years along in what you can think of as communities that we understand as having modern human traits.

If you look at all primate troops, they display some very common patterns of behavior. We not only share 99 plus percent of our DNA with chimpanzees, we share the substantial majority of our psychosocial behavioral profile. Absolutely all of the great apes—the chimpanzee troops, the gorilla troops, the baboon troops—more or less look to a leader to develop the line of march, to decide where they are going to go and forage for food, to be the first on the line to defend the troop, to keep order in the troop. They look to a leader to regulate the hierarchy of who's in and who's out. They rely on the leader to manage the boundaries of the troop. So leaders of these troops manage conflict; they set goals; they deter aggression; they do most of the things that in fact we expect modern leaders and modern organizations to do.

Human beings think we are really special, and we are not. Other primate troops share many of the behaviors that we display as human beings.

Watts: So the need for leadership is really "embedded in our DNA"?

Kilburg: If you put a group of human beings in a room, and you give them a task to do, they will almost automatically either suffer from the absence of leadership, or begin to struggle to elect or find leaders. Leaders will try to emerge.

We do simulations in our leadership development programs at Johns Hopkins, and I also do the leadership development work in other organizations. We can throw any group of people together and give them a task to do. In very, very,

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short order they begin to struggle with the issues of who is going to lead, who is going to follow, and how they are going to work together.

It's almost axiomatic that it happens. The only circumstance in which it tends not to happen is when groups of individuals who don't have strong relationships come together for some merely social interaction. But even at a party, you will see people who are "the lives of the party." They, in fact, exert a leadership role even in those kinds of social settings. I think that it is in fact very much hard-wired in human behavior.

Watts: What contributes to failure in leadership?

Kilburg: Summarizing from the literature, I would say there are really three interacting components of why leadership fails or why any individuals fails at leadership.

To begin with, there are characteristics of the individual that can get into his or her way. In these situations, people are found wanting because of who they are at a particular time.

However, you can't just take the individual and pop him or her out of the setting in which he or she is trying to lead. So you then look at the organization that he or she is in, and the environment that the organization is coping with.

We might do what we can think of as the behavioral autopsy. You go in after somebody has failed, or after somebody has succeeded, and you take a look at what has transpired. You can usually see an interaction between the individual, what he or she is trying to do, who they are as human beings, and how they enact processes of leadership in that organization to affect and interact with their environment. It's just really significant that there are certain environmental challenges that organizations go through that produce so many leadership casualties.

The same thing happens inside of organizations. A recent study in the *Harvard Business Review* demonstrated that CEOs have increasingly less and less time to be successful in their corporate roles and organizations. We are down to a place where the average CEO tenure in organizations and business organizations is a little over four years, which is simply astounding. People don't sit in these roles the way they used to, for a substantial period of time. The world is extremely competitive, and very demanding.

Watts: How does history affect our expectations and judgements of leaders?

Kilburg: There is a time horizon to perceptions of the success of leadership. But in business, one rarely has the advantage of lengthy periods of time to allow events to clarify themselves. We live in an execution-driven business world.

There are three core functions that leaders are expected to effect or perform. The first is to make discernments about what's going on in their world. Leaders are expected to be really good diagnosticians of their organization's situation. So, they have to see the world wisely, virtuously.

The second thing leaders have to do is to make a decision out of what is usually an extraordinarily complicated array of choices. Leaders are faced with the conundrum that even if they don't decide, that is still a choice. If you are a leader, you can't avoid the action of deciding. Then, the leader has to enact the decision. So, they have to discern wisely, they have to choose wisely, and they have to act wisely.

Look at George Bush's presidency, the decisions he has made about Iraq, and where the county is as a result of that. His administration, as with previous administrations, basically discerned: "Yes, Iraq is a problem; Hussein as dictator is a problem." Discerning that there was a problem, they diagnosed that the problem with Iraq and Hussein was weapons of mass destruction. And the decision that they made was that we were going to invade in a military fashion, rapid strike.

As the administration failed to listen to some of the available military advice, they kept a limited troop deployment in. They expected that the Iraqi people would celebrate the fact that the long-term dictator was overthrown, and they thought that the Iraqis would rapidly form a democratic government. Now, four years into the process, the administration is attempting to transform what has traditionally been a made-up country. Iraq was made up by the British when they tore the Ottoman Empire apart.

We have chosen to give them a democracy. We're trying to export a democratic model because the model is over the long-term. We think over the course of history—the next 50, 100, 200 years—that we can transform the Middle East. We believe that we can transform these Arabic nations—that have largely been kingdoms and Bedouin tribes—into modern democratic nations. That is the Grand Experiment. We are four years into the experiment and the verdict is still out on the experiment. The dictator is overthrown, tried, convicted, and executed.

Watts: So you believe that decisions and actions should be made with a long term perspective?

Kilburg: I think one of the central things that any leader has to ask him or herself is: "How long does this decision need to stand for?" Sometimes you make a decision and it's a one day decision. Or it's a one week decision, or it's a one year decision. Sometimes you make a decision and you know that you are betting the farm for the next five or ten years. I think that leaders have the responsibility to ask themselves that question when they are making particularly strategic choices, "How long do I expect this decision to have to stand for?"

A really interesting model was given to me by a colleague as I was preparing to write the book. She told me that the decision-making algorithm used by the tribal council of the Iroquois nation is to make no major decision affecting the tribe unless they have considered its effects for seven generations.

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If the subsequent administrations of the American government—when they decided to go to war, or they decided to build levees, or they decided to build transportation systems—were to ask the question "What is going to be the 150-year impact on the nation and its well-being?" I would suggest we would be in much better shape as a nation and as a people. Unfortunately, all too often what is happening now in our own government is that the time horizon is shortened and decisions are made based on the two year election cycle of Congress.

Watts: Can wisdom be learned from others or is it self-developed?

Kilburg: Wisdom is learned in both ways. I think the data are very, very clear in psychology now as we have made systematic studies over the last 30 to 40 years about human expertise. We have systematically studied everything from athletic to mathematical to music performance to performance as a chess master. In each of those areas of performance it takes approximately 10 years to rise to the level of expert performance, and even geniuses inside those domains take 10 years to develop excellence.

There are only two factors that really enable that kind of expert performance. The first one is very clear: practice, practice, practice. The second one is that you must be externally observed and provided objective feedback on your practice.

If you do those things over time—you practice, you are observed, and you get objective feedback about how you are doing—odds are you are going to improve in every domain in human behavior. I would argue, by analogy, that the same thing goes for virtues such as wisdom.

Watts: How do you think introspection develops a person's capacity to become wise?

Kilburg: Look to Socrates and Confucius and some of the ancient people who were known philosophers, but also the psychologists of their time. One of the things that Socrates said almost 2400 years ago is that wisdom begins when you know what you don't know. Wisdom begins with the question, "What don't I know about this situation, this person, this feeling, that I'm facing?" Asking oneself this question is fundamentally an introspective task.

Watts: You mention "behavioral geography" and "psychological geology" in your book. How do you define these terms?

Kilburg: They are both metaphors. Twentieth century psychology moved from introspectionism in the late 19th century into behaviorism and psychoanalysis in the early part of the 20th century. In the latter part of the 20th century, we've actually moved back into what is called the cognitive revolution. So, when you talk with psychologists, a lot of them will say you can't really describe what happens in the black box of the mind. They'll say that you can't get at the mind itself with any degree of objectivity or accuracy. They argue

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that you can only look at behavior, and that it is what people do. They say that the circumstances and conditions under which you reinforce or punish behavior will predict what happens. So the fundamentals that psychologists struggle with are: “How are people behaving externally?” and then “What’s going on in their minds and hearts related to their behavior?”

“Psychological geology” is a metaphor. Imagine this: You are driving along the interstate, and you come to a cut in the mountains of the large, modern superhighway. What you will see is the geography of the land. You will see lakes; you will see fields; you’ll see farms; you’ll see trees; you’ll see mountains. But as soon as you begin to cut into the mountain and go through the grade that’s usually been cut into the mountains, you’re going to see the layers of rock below. You’re going to see whether it’s hard rock, igneous rock, or whether it’s sedimentary rock. You’re going to see layers.

A geologist sees what’s below the surface and the strata of rock underneath, not the geography, not what you can see on the surface. The same thing goes with human behavior. So, “psychological geography” refers to behaviors that you can see any individual or group or organization perform. “Psychological geology,” on the other hand, really relates to the internal processes, the things going on in the unconscious. Psychological geology is about the unconscious—the unseen space that contributes to the overt behavior of individuals as well as organizations.

Watts: We’ve been discussing wisdom. Can you tell us how executive stupidity can be avoided?

Kilburg: We have to recognize that Dilbert isn’t so popular by accident. In my estimation stupidity comes down to various forms of blindness on the part of leaders.

Watts: Can you give an example of blindness that leads to stupidity?

Kilburg: (Gives a political example.) The point is that they had a model; they had an informed estimate of what they would need to make the plan work. But, they also had a limited amount of resources. So they based their new model and their decisions on the resources that they had available at the time.

I have another term of art that I use to describe, particularly in corporate America, it’s what I call “spreadsheet.” Imagine the annual budget exercise. You come into one of those meetings and what is sitting in front of everyone is a stack, or a mountain, of Excel spreadsheets, with budget projections and lots of numbers. The committees who work on the budget, the executive team, and sometimes the board of directors, will sit there with these mounds of numbers and try to make wise choices about what is going to happen. The thing they don’t generally consider is that those numbers are made up! They’re only projections; the formulas can be manipulated. That’s the beauty of an Excel spreadsheet.

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They will conduct a budgetary process as though the numbers are real, and not simply a projection.

Trusting projections is like being in Plato's cave, looking at the shadows on the wall, and not turning around to look and stand directly in front of the fire. You have to ask: "Whose spreadsheet is this? What are they trying to accomplish? And are the data being presented to you accurate? What are the roots; what are the foundations?" If you believe what people are telling you, and you don't go to the roots, don't validate what's happening—then you're engaged in stupid leadership. You're in essence expressing your biases about reality; you're not testing reality.

Watts: How can leadership development efforts train executives to become wiser?

Kilburg: There are two major approaches to developing ethical behavior. One is called "rule ethics"and another is called "virtue ethics." In rule ethics what you do is establish a code of conduct and say "this is the right way to behave; here's our ethical code." The American Psychological Association, for example, has a complex ethical code, covering many things. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, basically goes about the business of trying to develop people who are virtuous, who are just and courageous, and temperate and wise, and reverent. It's the difference between teaching people what to do and teaching people how to be.

Our current executive development models are largely competency based models; they're largely driven by scientific research. Some of it is very, very, good. I did a review of competency models for a presentation at the American Psychological Association. Embedded in many of the best competency models, in fact, is substitute language for virtues.

Most of our leadership programs are trying to teach people what to do. They are not trying to teach them or help them become more virtuous people. I think what our leadership programs have to do is try to help people understand who they really are as people and how to be better as people. I believe that if you do both things, teach skills and help people develop virtue, through time better and wiser leaders will emerge.

Watts: What qualities and traits should companies and human resources staff look for when selecting a leader?

Kilburg: There are two things that you need to do, and they're strongly related to why people fail. The first thing is to understand the setting, or the environment that you're asking a leader to enter. One organization, industry, or even time in an organization's life is not the same as another. So, first and foremost you should know that somebody has experience related to the organization's setting, as well as experience related to the challenges that the organization is going to face.

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The second thing you want is to systematically explore whether this person is virtuous. You want to know whether this person has performed, behaved, and acted in virtuous ways throughout his or her life.

You say to the candidate "This is the set of circumstances that you're going to be facing as a leader. Now tell me about the troubles, issues, and challenges you've already encountered that you think are related to this setting and this context." Then listen really, really carefully as to whether you believe that that person has the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, virtues, and experiences.

As you know with the failure rates that we have with leadership, even if you're doing a really comprehensive job of selection, it's still left to chance. So I think the best way to go about it is to examine the context that the person is going to be in, look really hard for the experience that they have related to that context, and then look to who they are as people.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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