

## BOOK REVIEW

### *“Becoming a Resonant Leader: Develop Your Emotional Intelligence, Renew Your Relationships, Sustain Your Effectiveness”*

*Authors:* Annie McKee, Richard Boyatzis and Frances Johnston

*Publisher:* Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, Massachusetts, 2008

Reviewed by **Taruna Gupta**

Great Lakes Institute of Management

E-mail: taruna.g@greatlakes.edu.in

There is no nobler goal than to lead people to excellence, fulfillment, and collective achievement. Today the society needs people who can see beyond today, spark hope instead of despair, and draw others into an intentional journey of transformation. Need is of more great leaders who think and act in new ways -- women and men unafraid to travel the road less taken, the road that requires vision and courage.

In 2002, the authors wrote “Primal Leadership” with Daniel Goleman to answer the following questions: What is great leadership? What differentiates the best leaders from the average?

On the basis of research, stories and their own experiences they built the case that emotional intelligence and the ability to create resonant relationships were the keys to create great leadership...On the spread of the message of this book again there were questions raised by the people around the world: How can one create resonant relationships? How can one develop emotional intelligence and resonant leadership?

This book on resonant leadership has been effective in providing answers for the same. It has included powerful and transformative exercises which are very helpful to develop emotional intelligence and one's capacity for resonant leadership as the reader charts a path towards personal vision for his or her life and work.

Some points of the book are particularly noteworthy and keep the reader hooked on:-

1. To spark the desire and energy for change, we need to imagine and articulate an ideal self: who could I be if I were at my very best, living and working effectively, fully, and happily?...Next, after we have discovered our ideal self and personal vision, we need to have a clear sense of our real self: who we are today, our strengths and weaknesses, and how we influence others..... (p. 9).
2. Dan... defined resonant leadership. He listened to his people and really heard them. He inspired trust.....Because he had previously reflected on his own values, he was able to respond clearly and empathetically in the moment, even in the face of some opposing views coming from his team (p. 13).
3. A surprising number of people miss this lesson (that they have good deal of power); they fail to realize their power....Many of us are just humble enough.. to ignore the impact of powerful positions we hold in life and at work (p. 14).
4. Another example in the book—“Fred Hassan....From Sandoz (Pakistan) Ltd. to Pharmacia to Schering Plough, every organization he touches has been left healthier than when he found it... He quotes, “In my value system, the human factor is most important” (p. 32).

5. Emotions are contagious. Just as they travel like electricity in our brains and bodies, feelings travel rapidly between people. Unlike the closed loop of say, our circulatory system, emotions are an open loop system.....Your circulatory system has no impact on the circulation of someone standing nearby....Your emotional state can affect the emotional state of someone standing next to you (p. 31).
6. The example on Page 92 presents interesting facts of real day to day life .The concept of “operating philosophy” has explained the different actions of two set of people having same values.

The book takes the reader through a journey of statements, stories of leaders who have managed to develop and sustain resonance, and well planned exercises. It starts with the clear notion that leadership is *learned* though innate qualities and childhood experiences have a role to play. But even these have to be enhanced and leveraged or they may be left underutilized. The description of ideal self and prologue of assessing real self mentioned in the beginning is developed gradually as the chapters proceed through self assessment and self awareness exercises.

The myths mentioned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter are revelations. One such myth is: “Your mood does not matter”. It reveals that resonant leadership is not about being nice. The resonant leaders are not always nice, but they always create an environment in which people are optimistic. The example of Fred Hassan serves as a soothing balm to the reader in leadership position (or any lead role), as he gets relieved of the guilt, when he has been less tolerant of passive resistance or cynical attitudes and makes people do something else, if they do not change their behavior even when given a chance.

Holistic development is an integral road to leadership. Leadership is a conscious process, starting with one's own personal vision and hopes for the future. Leadership requires emotional and social intelligence. Resonant leader is a person who is self aware, can manage himself or herself in stressful environments, and empathizes with other people. He or she knows what inhibits the individual and the team performance.

Resonant leadership needs mindfulness and ability to react positively to wake up calls. Wake up calls are nature's way of alerting us to pay attention to our behavior, attitudes, values and relationships. When we focus on what is wrong in the present moment, we often lose sight of our dreams and lose our capacity to hope for a better future. The combination of self-efficacy and an optimistic vision of a feasible future sparks hope. Optimistic vision arises only when it has the foundation of positive set of values and beliefs. These values affect how we interpret and perceive people and events around us.

Two people who have the same set of values may have different choices regarding how they act in life. Thus their operating philosophy, a set of beliefs, determines how people manifest their values.

We are a social species. The relational world in which we currently live and work, helps us to determine the power of how we experience our social roles and identities. These help us in discovering our real self. The start is made by tapping the strengths. This empowers us to manage through the unsettling work of facing up to need for change.

When there is gap between strengths we see in ourselves and strengths others see in us, it may not be weaknesses, but are areas of self awareness and as such may get in the way of our

achieving our ideal. Resonant leaders are constantly attending to and attuning themselves to the people they lead. Thus they are in reflective process continuously. Thus there may be a need to expand the range of colors available to one's ideal self and dreams. The colors of the past may no longer be inspiring to oneself.

The aim of this book is to help the reader in becoming the best person and the best leader he or she can be. The exercises in this book encourage the readers to find their personal vision and their ideal future, to gather insight about themselves, and to formulate and begin working with a learning to take them to the next phase of their lives. The best leaders move people. They engage people's hearts and minds and help direct people's energy, individually and collectively, toward a desired end.

There are many (approximately 59) exercises such as, “Things I want to do before I die” (p. 78); “My ideal life,” which gives the reader a situation of 15 years hence and someone videotaping the reader all day long. He or she has to then answer the questions: What would you see in that video? Where would you be? What are you doing? Who else is there? This example is really a shot in the arm for a person who is depressed and extends a hand of optimism towards him or her.

There is another exercise which has been conceptualized beautifully and simplifies the understanding of complex relationships of human beings and their effect on the person both professionally and personally. It gives clear perspective of resonant and dissonant relationships.

The style of the book is reader friendly as many concepts have been simplified and made easy enough for the reader to comprehend its in-depth meaning. With the presence of exercises the depth of study has been added. So the reader not only gets the chance to read through but also get involved in such a way that he or she identifies with the book. The journey through which the authors wish to take the reader has been a smooth road. All it needs is patience and calm reading on the part of the reader.

#### **Some areas which can be improved are as follows:**

Some chapters like in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, “Listening to your wake-up calls” does not instantly mention the concept in the beginning of the chapter. The concept of wake up call is explained later in the chapter. Thus, it creates confusion for the readers when they try to relate the title of the chapter with the content in the first part of the chapter.

Some terms such as sacrifice syndrome have been used to explain the problems that are there in the people who fail to be resonant leaders. But this term sacrifice syndrome itself has not been explicitly explained (p. 57).

Some exercises in the book attract the initial interest of the reader, but after the completion of the exercise the reader feels lost as there is no interpretation given at the end of the exercise and leaves the reader in self assuming situation. There is no conclusion reached after the reader attempts the exercise. Mindfulness check-in is an example (pp. 50-51).

Though the exercises are aimed at better and deeper evaluation of self to the reader, they prove sometimes to be irksome when the reader is engrossed in reading. They break the continuity.