

# Wisdom & the Will to Live

By Bruce Lloyd



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## **LEADERSHIP**

**It is important to recognise that leadership is ultimately about taking the best decisions we can about the future; driven by obtaining and using the best information, combined with a genuine concern for other people, and the wider interest; as well as being focused on the longer term. As a result both leadership and strategy are ultimately about values, and this happens when ever we take decisions about resources, or are in communication with other people. Basically leadership is little more than 'the well informed, responsible use of power. In other words it is wise leadership.**

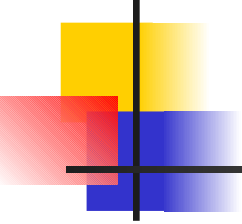


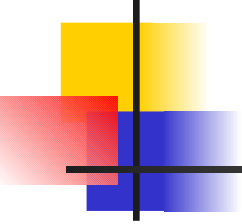
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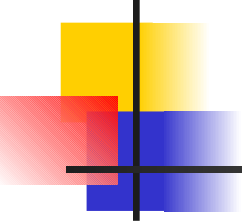
- **DIALOGUE**

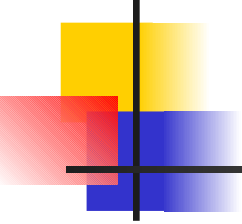
**In my view, there are no absolute answers, and so the only way to make progress is to try to ensure that the quality of the dialogue between all concerned (ie all the stakeholders) is as effective as possible. In the end, the quality of our decisions depends on the quality of our dialogue; and that is not only dialogue about information, but perhaps even more important, it is about what is the best way to use that information – in other words it is about our values. Dialogue facilitates both the transfer of technical knowledge, as well as being an invaluable part of personal development. Having a quality dialogue over values is not only the most important issue we need to address, but it is often the most difficult.**

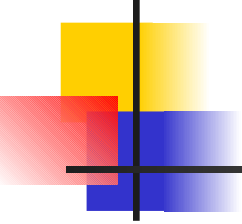
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- a quote by Gary Marx, a leading educational futurist, at recent World Future Society meeting:  
**“Greater numbers of people will seek personal meaning in their lives in response to an intense high tech, always on, fast-moving society.”**
  - Victor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, believed that **the cornerstone of good mental health is about having a purpose.**
  - **“Materialistic goals may even cause dissatisfaction with life and mental disorders, such as paranoia.”**  
Report by James Montier, DrKW reported by Financial Times 5/4/05.
  - **“Mental illness has replaced unemployment as the UK’s biggest social problem.”**  
“Mental illness ‘biggest problem’” Lord Layard, Financial Times 17/6/06.
  - Also a recent book by Avner Offer, argued that:  
**‘a sense of well-being has lagged behind affluence in these societies because they present an environment in which consistent choices are difficult to achieve and in which the capacity for personal and social commitment is undermined by the flow of novelty.’**  
**‘The Challenge of Affluence: Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain since 1950,’** Avner OFFER, Oxford University Press (2006).

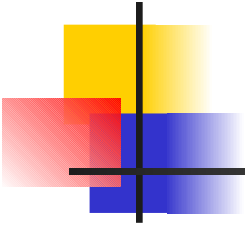
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- **1. What is the main influence in your life that you feel gives it meaning?**
  - **2. What do you consider is the main influence that gives meaning to other people in general?**

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- **What provides meaning to our lives?**
  - **What are the forces for change?**
  - **Are these increasing / decreasing?**
  - **What are the implications (... for a longer life)?**
  - **How can we influence these forces in a 'positive' direction?**

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- **“Data is not information. Information is not knowledge. Knowledge is not understanding. Understanding is not Wisdom.”**  
(Anon)
  - **“ The Function of Wisdom is to discriminate between good and evil”**  
(Marcus Tullius Cicero)
  - **“Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.”**  
(Anton Chekhov (1860-1904))

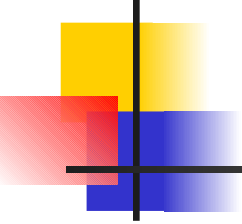
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- Some evidence of the challenges (**Social Indicators**) in this area that need to be recognised:
  - **Suicide** (Australia main cause of death for under 24 year old males)
  - **Stress / Depression** "Depression is the inability to construct a future." (Rollo May (1909 -1994))
  - **Drugs / Alcoholism / substance abuse**
  - ("A sharp increase in the number of people drinking themselves to death in England was revealed in official figures yesterday .... Alcoholic liver disease rose by 37% in the five years to 2004 with 4,000 people dying ... Hospital admissions in 2004-5 were a record 35,400 compared with 14,4000 in 1995/6. About two-thirds were men." *'Alcohol deaths soaring new figures show'* by John Carrel, *Guardian* 1/7/06.)
  - **Great family breakdown** ...new forms ....single living ... ("Older people who live alone double their risk of heart disease", *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, quoted in *The Times* 13/7/06.)
  - **Bullying / domestic violence**
  - **Obesity**
  - **Crime** (80%+ 2 dimensions and 2 easy solutions – dialogue+ reduced materialism)
  - **Falling life expectancy** Some (over 20?) countries actually have a.
  - **Media / Democracy** issues around expectations and control ...





- I would also like to acknowledge the parallel (and overlapping) contributions of other publications:
  1. **The Wisdom Literature**, Appendix C in **First Things First** by Stephen R. Covey & A. Roger Merrill, Simon & Schuster (1994), which explores the patterns, consistencies and themes that they consider represented the most validated database in all human experience.
  - 2. **The Wisdom of the Ages: Eternal Truths for Everyday Life**, by Wayne W. Dyer, Thorsons (1998), which is a remarkable analysis of how we can live more meaningful lives by close study of the words of poets and philosophers throughout the ages.
  - 3. **Working Wisdom: The Ultimate Value in the New Economy**, by John Della Costa, Stoddart Publishing Co. (1995). It strongly argues that our perceived wisdom is the driving force behind our behaviour and that the subject is a vital part of any effective Knowledge Management programme.

Yet in a quick survey of eighteen books on Knowledge Management, I found only three felt the subject of wisdom was sufficiently important to mention in the index. Apart from those mentioned above, which were not essentially knowledge management books, none gave the subject of wisdom the importance I believe it justifies. The same comment can equally apply to books on Leadership, where the whole subject of Wisdom is rarely mentioned.

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- And what are some of the general wisdom messages that we might like to pass onto future generations?

**"Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell."** (Edward Abbey)

**"By doubting, we come to examine, and by examining, so we perceive the truth."** (Peter Abelard)

**"It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them."** (Alfred Adler)

**"Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right use of strength"** (Henry Ward Beecher)

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- And a few specifically Future related wisdom quotations:

**"The farther back you look, the farther forward you see."**  
(Winston Churchill)

**"If you won't be better tomorrow than you were today then what do you need tomorrow for?"** (Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1811))

**"Depression is the inability to construct a future."** (Rollo May (1909 - 1994))

**"You must be the change you want to see in the world."**  
(Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948))

**"Education is your passport to the future. For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."** (Malcolm X (1925-1965))

**"I touch the future: I teach."** (Christa MacAuliffe, astronaut (1948-1986))



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The core issues of Leadership were well defined over two thousand years ago by Lao Tzu when he argued:

**“The highest type of rule is one whose existence the people are barely aware.**

**Next comes one whom they love and praise.**

**Next comes one whom they fear.**

**Next comes one whom they despise and defy.**

**When you are lacking faith,**

**Others will be unfaithful to you.**

**The Sage is self-effacing and scanty of words.**

**When his(\*) task is accomplished and things have been completed,**

**All the people say, ‘We ourselves have achieved it!’”**

((\*) Now ‘their)