

INTRODUCTION

It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err.

—Gandhi

He was a small, slender man, perhaps five foot four or an inch taller. He could have been fifty years old. Or forty. Or sixty-five; it was impossible to tell. He had brown, sun-weathered skin that gave lie to his residence in the sun-starved Pacific Northwest. His hair was close-cropped, so I couldn't discern its color. When I first saw him, he was wearing a leather Harley-Davidson cap and smoking one of those "all natural" cigarettes like Native Spirit. It was like meeting a character taken, immediate and breathing, from a scene in *Easy Rider*. But he was real, and he was part of the inspiration for this book. His name was Sawyer.

I met Sawyer upon gathering with dear family friends after the sudden and tragic loss of their daughter, Carly. As a huge outpouring of friends and relations converged on the bereaved at their home in suburban Seattle, several men gathered to grieve, meditate, and heal through a uniquely male ritual: the Native American sweat lodge. If you have never experienced a sweat lodge, it's quite primal. The gathered men work together to build a small, temporary lodge in which they congregate, strip down to their shorts or skivvies, and sit in communion for hours. In the center of the floor are "grandfather stones"; a sacred fire is kindled under them outside the lodge,

and after they are white-hot, they are carefully delivered into the lodge where a water pourer douses them with water periodically to create a scalding steam that makes the lodge positively oppressive. The men sit in this dark, quiet, sweltering haven and share stories, hear wisdom from elders, and purify themselves.

Sawyer, an elder in the ManKind Project community and trained in Native American language and ritual, directed our crew in building our sweat lodge with simple, clipped instructions: “Over there,” and “Do it this way.” When the lodge was complete, we entered and began the process of stripping away our defenses and our attachments—of becoming fully present to our own fears and grief so that we could help my friend both bear and shed his sorrow. Sawyer now became our water pourer and master of ceremonies. He led the rituals and songs that sounded as if they came from the earth itself. His tone and mood were serious and thoughtful, but not somber. He was as grounded as an oak and completely comfortable with the spiritual.

With his leadership, we engaged in songs and blessings and released our cries to the universe. We welcomed the spirits to our sacred space, and when we shared stories between songs, Sawyer maintained the narrative thread. His perspective on life and death was extraordinary: “We are all connected to each other, and all men are my fathers and grandfathers,” he would say. He would speak of animals as equals, referring to them as “the four-legged ones” or “the ones that fly.” He blew apart our closely held myths about death, spirit, and our ownership of our bodies.

“This young woman who has passed, we don’t use her name, out of respect,” he said at one point. “Some said that she lived a short life. But in my tradition, she lived a life. Who can know that twenty years is too short? That is our judgment of what a full life can be. She lived as full a life in those years as any of us have lived in our bodies. Spirit does not have an end.” It was like sitting in the presence of an ancient sage, a real-world Gandalf without the long beard.

After some time, helpers brought in more grandfather stones until there were about forty stones in all. We were positively broiling in the lodge. I looked at Sawyer, lit by the glowing stones, and thought, “This guy could be sixty years old; he’s going to drop dead in this heat.” Instead, he looked utterly content, totally present, and perfectly centered. In ninety minutes, he took a grieving father and stepfather, along with brothers, stepbrothers, and friends, and transformed our states of mind through simple statements, elemental rituals, and his profound presence.

When we gratefully emerged dripping wet from the lodge into the cool air, Sawyer said little. He towed off, made arrangements to pick up the lodge on another day, dropped his Harley cap on his head, lit one of his smokes, climbed into his truck, and took off. I was completely taken by this character. It would have been incredibly easy to prejudge him as some blue-collar laborer with his cigarettes and his truck, and I didn’t doubt that many people had dismissed him as exactly that without a second thought.

Their loss. As soon as he opened his mouth, it was clear that this was a man who was and is completely present in head, hands, heart, and spirit. He was content with how he walked on this earth and with being precisely who he was. He didn’t just utter wisdom; he was wisdom. I spent two hours with the man and I will never forget him.

277,000 and Counting

Sawyer was a leader in the truest of senses—in who and what he was, not just in what he did. By example, he showed the rest of us how we could choose to find our own meaning in the tragedy we were mourning. Sawyer came to vivid life in my mind when I set out to write *Leadersh*t: Rethinking the True Path to Great Leading*.

As I was thinking about the kind of book I wanted to write, it was clear what I didn’t want to write: a clone of the approximately

277,000 other books on leading and leadership that already clog bookstore shelves like plaque in coronary arteries. There are some important foundational concepts in some of those books, and yet most are guilty of a multitude of sins: promoting the latest business-school trends, propagating ridiculous myths, or rehashing warmed-over advice about motivation and vision-setting.

I also didn't want my book to be another preachy how-to manual pushing a trademarked one-size-fits-all solution. I wanted to cut through the deafening clatter and impossible clutter and bring people something true and transformative. I knew I wasn't going to do that by writing another book filled with steps and processes. No two organizations, or people, are alike. Could I develop a proprietary multi-step program or method that would apply to everybody from CEOs to mid-level managers from any organization and magically turn them into effective leaders? Of course not. It would be arrogance to assume that I could.

I also knew that I wasn't just writing for occupants of the C-suite. First-level supervisors are leaders, too. So are the moms who run Girl Scout troops. So are sports coaches and teachers. Parents might be the most important and least rewarded leaders of all time. I wanted to speak to them as well, because their wisdom often comes closer to the heart of what I teach than all the material from a hundred corporate seminars and how-to methodologies.

Then I remembered Sawyer, who so embodied the approach I use in my work with leaders. I call it Wisdom Leading™. Just as he had shared timeless truths about the self and spirit with the men in the sweat lodge, I wanted to share timeless truths about what it takes to perform at your best and encourage greatness from others—truths that apply whether you're a CEO or a choral director and whether you're running a billion-dollar, private-equity-owned healthcare firm or coaching a junior-college baseball team. I imagined what it would be like to spend a few days with someone like Sawyer, just listening and learning. And just like that, I had it.

So it is that on the coming pages you will encounter a Foster Mobley you may not have seen or heard before. By envisioning myself on a classic road trip with a wise man very much like Sawyer, I believe I have tapped into a voice unlike anything in those other 277,000 books: calm, reasoned, and wise, with a focus on *leading*—the fundamental connection of self and others—not *leadership*, an overworked and confusing jumble of issues surrounding position, power, and heroic financial or technical exploits. I'm less interested in stories about people who, due to their financial acumen or technological breakthroughs, grace the covers of *Fortune* and *Businessweek*. Instead, I have attempted to craft a storytelling framework that will encourage you to explore the emotional, psychological and spiritual borderlands of what it means to be a *leader* of people. You be the judge of whether or not I've done my job.

Leading Versus Leadersh*t

Before we get into it, let's talk about leading as opposed to leadersh*t. To me, *leading* means *building capacity in yourself and others to create breakthrough results*. However, in thirty-plus years as a consultant, speaker, and executive coach, I have found myself increasingly frustrated with the misguided nature of much of what goes by the innocuous name "leadership"—what I call leadersh*t.

Whatever you call it, it's not working very well. A global survey of 836 senior managers in Australia, Denmark, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, India, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, conducted in June 2010 by executive search firm Egon Zehnder International, showed that nearly 70 percent of executives believe corporate leaders lack basic business competencies and innovation skills as well as the ability to drive change and customer focus. A December 2008 global survey of 828 senior executives by Booz & Company found that 40 percent doubted their corporate leaders had a plan to weather the recession, while 46 percent said

that even if such a plan were in place, they doubted their leaders had the ability to execute it. Finally, according to a 2007 Towers Perrin survey of nearly 9,000 workers around the world, only 21 percent felt fully engaged at work, while 40 percent felt disengaged or disenchanting.

Despite this, for decades the greatest theoreticians in leadership and organization development have preached a gospel based on the same basic ideas: if executives and companies master a set of new processes, methods, or tools, they will be able to motivate, organize, and inspire their people and turn dysfunctional businesses into superpowers. I divide these experts into four categories:

1. *The Econo-Stars*—These include Jack Welch of GE, Larry Bossidy of Allied Signal, and Andy Grove of Intel. They'll tell you how they did it and how you should emulate what they did to confront turbulent times.

2. *The Consul-Stars*—These include Ram Charan, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, and Stephen Covey and Ken Blanchard. Each of these thinkers provides a collection of “answers” that focuses on the success paths of others, told through compelling anecdotes, and suggests a partial, one-size-fits-all solution.

3. *Academic/Literary Stars*—Warren Bennis, John Kotter, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, John W. Gardner and many others contribute extensive research and historical perspectives, laying the foundation for much of what we know today as the accepted frameworks for business and societal leadership.

4. *Mythologists*—Such luminaries as Spencer Johnson, MD (of *Who Moved My Cheese?* fame) and Patrick Lencioni (*Five Temptations of a CEO*) use parables to break down one small aspect of a very complex issue and offer a comforting prescription.

I stand on the shoulders of these giants. Throughout my career, I have walked from the thoughts and insights of one to the next

like a boy crossing a pond on stepping-stones. Exposure to each leadership worldview and methodology has sparked questions and provoked new thinking. I'm in their debt.

And here's the thing: Every one of them is wrong about what makes a great leader.

Leadersh*t is my catchall term for the myths, lazy thinking, misconceptions, and product marketing that distract individuals from doing the cognitive heavy lifting that produces powerful performance and lasting, positive change. Confusion is rampant in this field because there are few standards. What makes a great leader? How do you build one? Are the best leaders born? Made? Do you become one by mastering a set of skills, competencies, processes, and systems, as the myriad books and trainers suggest? Because there is no consensus on what leadership means or what works, flavor-of-the-month initiatives and generic solutions rule the day. The author with the trendiest book or the company with the most convincing sales pitch wins . . . *whether or not their ideas have any positive impact on the individual's or the company's performance.*

Charisma, skills, competencies, and processes may matter, but they take a back seat to mindful presence, calm, wisdom, and self-awareness. Effective leading begins with personal transformation—with knowing and nurturing your senses of purpose and meaning and the source of your vitality. For me it's this simple: the journey to powerful leading always goes through the self. Despite its contrarian title, *Leadersh*t: Rethinking the True Path to Great Leading* represents my life's commitment to the discovery and practice of powerful leading and performance. It presents an empowering, effective alternative to the junk methods that make people and organizations *feel* as though they are taking bold steps toward the future when in reality they are wasting time and money trying to fix what isn't broken. You already have everything you need to be a more effective leader.