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# Thoughts from Leland Kaiser

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## HOW DISCONTENT HELPS CREATE A GREAT LEADER

Behind every great organization is a great leader, but how do great leaders come into being? What events or processes conspire to spur a leader to make a bold and high-risk attempt to transform an organization?

Leaders generally are thought to emerge in one of two ways. The first is that certain circumstances reach the critical point where someone stands up to the plate. A good example of this is Winston Churchill, who was uniquely stirred by the challenge of war and found his fulfillment in leading the democracies to victory. The second theory is that some leaders are simply born with inner qualities that predispose them to assume leadership roles.

I suspect there is also a third kind of leader — the person who emerges as a leader through a transformation process that leaves him or her very different from the person he or she was at the beginning. I suspect this is how Mark Scott evolved from a somewhat typical hospital administrator to a leader capable of completely transforming an organization and, in some respects, influencing an industry.

A profound, spiritual transforming process gives some people the motivation, desire, insight, or whatever it is, that changes their nature and propels them to greatness.

What sparks such a transformation? I believe there has to be some process of discontent. For many people, achieving success via the traditional business model is enough, and they are content to devote their entire careers to that pursuit. For other people, for whatever reason, this is not enough. At some point they realize, “I can’t do this the rest of my life. It’s not fulfilling me. I’m getting better and better at doing what I don’t want to do.”

People often call this “burnout,” but it’s not that. It’s not that they

*cannot* do the job anymore; it's that they don't *want* to do it anymore. It's not fun anymore. They are hungry and searching for something more.

This discontent leaves them much more responsive to outside possibilities. They begin looking around and become more sensitive to ideas that are new and different. They suddenly see different messages, different insights, different world views and say, "I like that better than I like mine."

Most people don't fight their environment; they just adapt to it. They can adapt themselves out of existence before they'll challenge their environment. But some people will eventually say, "I don't want to be a passive adapter; I want to become the center of action. Rather than having the environment act upon me, I will act upon the environment."

Of course, that creates a real reversal of dynamics. Suddenly, that person becomes a disruptive force. He or she is rocking the boat and changing the chemistry of everything. If that person is in a leadership position, his or her people will have to change the way they are to match the way their leader has changed.

Mark Scott was tired of his environment, tired of doing what everyone else in healthcare was doing. He was doing it successfully and could have continued doing it that way until he retired. But that wasn't enough for him. He was ready to leave. In the next chapter, you'll see how a chance meeting at a healthcare conference was the spark that ignited a profound spiritual transformation in Mark, which ultimately would spark profound organizational transformation at Mid-Columbia Medical Center.

Discontent may have been the driving factor behind Mark's transformation, but what else produces the spark of personal transformation? I believe that whenever a person exhibits signs of anxiety, unrest and changes in energy level, he or she is being staged and getting ready for change. This is often viewed the wrong way, as a psychiatric problem. The person is seen as someone who can't stand the heat and needs to get out of the kitchen.

Rather than viewing this as something being wrong, we should see it as something being right. Those symptoms can be used as fuel to spur personal growth.

For a true transformation to occur, a leader must be driven by principles rather than personal security. Because invariably a leader will get to the point of drawing a line in the sand and saying, “This is what I need to do. If the rest of you don’t want to do it, that’s okay; but if that’s the case, I’m moving on.”

There may come a time when you have to ask yourself, “Is this decision worth my career?” If the answer is “No,” then you step back. But every once in a while, the answer is “Yes.”