

by
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Catching the Wave of Conscious Leadership

You've probably not only heard of EQ, but done the training, right?

Consciousness is part of an emerging zeitgeist that is gathering momentum right here, right now. The consciousness wave is still forming...but it's going to be huge, a transformation of humanity and, as part of that humanity, business.

Patricia Aburdene writes about it in her book: *Megatrends 2010: The Rise of Conscious Capitalism*¹. Peter Russell, a British futurist, writes in *The Global Brain Awakens*² that we will soon, in the first quarter of this

century, be entering into an Age of Consciousness that will replace the Age of Information.

With this kind of gathering of momentum, the question is: are you at the front of the wave or following behind it?

Conscious Business and Conscious Leadership presents the opportunity to surf the wave and be involved in thought leadership that is at the very cutting edge of transformation in business today.





Why the need for Conscious Business?



It's not difficult to see that the way we have been doing business is not sustainable. The arc of regulatory disasters, from Enron to Worldcom to Lehman Brothers, to mention but a few of the recent debacles, and the global economic recession of the past few years, point to businesses' desire to put profits first and everything else second – ultimately, even to their own demise. There is a huge call, not only from hard-paying customers, but from the whole issue of sustainability, for businesses to show that they can be trusted and that they are not acting solely out of greed and a single-minded drive to maximize profits. Corporations and capitalism have, as John Mackey, Co-CEO of Whole Foods Market puts it, “serious branding problems.”³

Business is probably the most powerful force in society today – and therefore leaders in businesses have a custodianship to fulfill that surpasses anything that has gone before. We're not just talking about Corporate Social Responsibility here – too often that is a company's token nod at being seen to be 'doing the right thing' for the sake of its stakeholders and its customers, but ultimately nothing has changed in the way people operate in that organisation.

Conscious business is about becoming a true partner with society, in the widest possible sense. It's about considering the triple bottom line – people, planet and profit, and not putting one ahead of the other. It's about acting out of a responsibility to the whole system and from an

understanding of the interconnectedness of all constituents of a business. This is very different from the tendencies of most businesses and leaders, which is to act out of a belief that everything is separate and that what we choose to do does not have an effect on the whole – or, if it does, that we don't care.

Importantly, conscious business is not at odds with competition. Conscious business leaders can have a marvelous time playing the game competitively on the field. Where they are coming from, however, is not survival and overpowering another, not from a mindset of scarcity and threat, but instead from a meta-level position of playing the game consciously on the field, which involves a mindset of abundance and a sense of responsibility towards the whole, including their competitors as part of that game.

Many of the world's foremost and groundbreaking conscious businesses – Whole Foods Market, Google, Patagonia, The Container Store and Southwest Airlines – practice balance and moderation between the various constituents of their business:



Historically, as Mackey explains it, our economic models of business were created during the Industrial Revolution when companies were regarded in the same way as machines. It was an effort in – profit out model. The world has become much more complex since those days of simple machine metaphors, although current business thinking is still lagging behind: business models do not easily grasp the complex interdependencies of all constituents of a business and its responsibilities towards all stakeholders, not only the shareholders. A conscious leader’s role is to optimize the health and value of this entire, complex interdependent system.

Profit

This is not to say that conscious businesses don’t have profit as a primary driver or that they are hostile towards profit. Profits are one of the most important goals of any successful business and investors are one of the most important stakeholders of public businesses. However, it is not profit at the expense of the whole, and that is where we have seen things going so wrong in the past.

Mackey talks engagingly about businesses getting in touch with their deeper purpose rather than focusing primarily on their profit-making (profits, ironically, tends to happen as a by-product of a great and deeply-felt purpose). He describes how this deeper purpose is highly energizing for all the stakeholders of a business.

The best way, he says, to maximize profits over the long term is to not aim directly at them – in much the same way that happiness is not gained by grasping after ‘being happy’ but rather that it

follows as a by-product of purpose, meaningful work, great friends, good health, personal growth, positive relationships with many people and helping others to flourish in their lives.

Great Purposes Beyond Profit

Mackey lists these as:

“The Good” – service to others, empathy for the needs of others, driven by care and compassion to all stakeholders. Whole Foods Market; Southwest Airlines; Nordstrom.

“The True” – excitement of discovery and pursuit of truth, advancing the wellbeing of humanity. Google, Intel, Genetech.

“The Beautiful” – search for excellence and the quest for perfection, makes our lives more enjoyable. Apple, Four Seasons Hotels.

“The Heroic” – changing or improving the world through heroic efforts. Microsoft, Gates Foundation, Grameen Bank.

“Profits are best achieved by not making them the primary goal of the business.

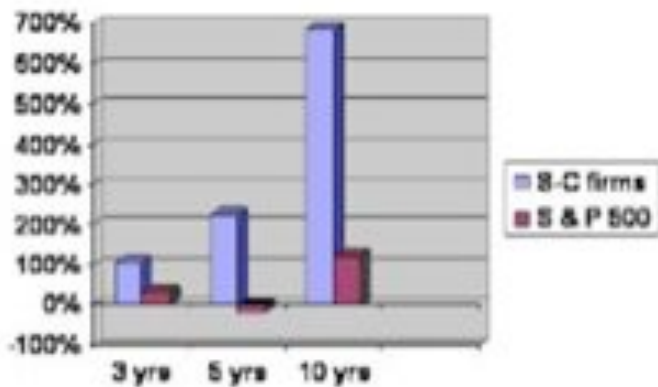
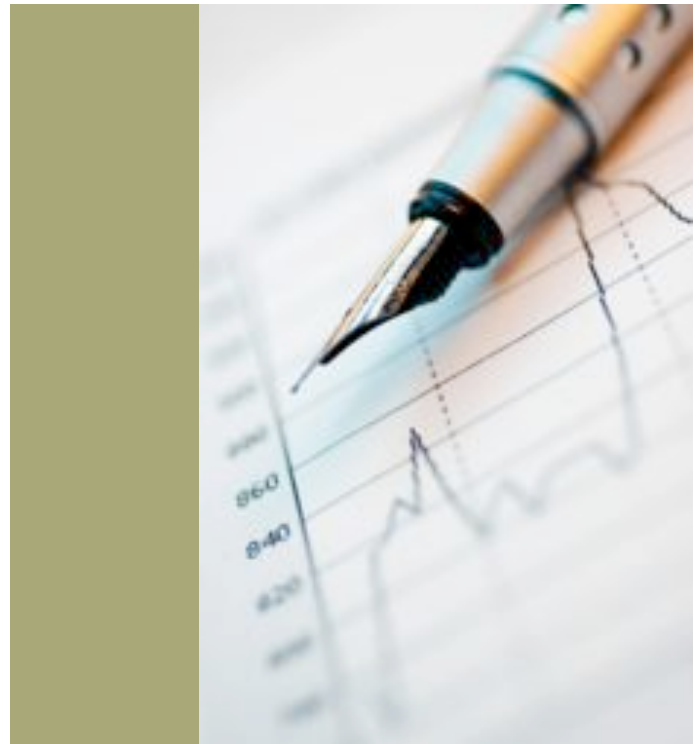
Rather, long-term profits are the result of having a deeper business purpose, great products, customer satisfaction, happy employees, excellent suppliers and community and environmental responsibility.”

John Mackey, CEO Whole Foods Market
Conscious Capitalism driver

For the Skeptics

If you are reading the above with skepticism, take a look at the following:

David Wolfe and his colleagues conducted a study comparing traditional profit-centered businesses with stakeholder-centered (or conscious) businesses. In *Firms of Endearment: The Pursuit of Purpose and Profit (2007)*⁴ they compared 30 stakeholder-centered businesses against those focusing strictly on profits, and tracked their stock performance over ten years. This is what they found:



Investment Performance of Stakeholder-Centered Businesses

Their results indicate that companies that are managed in order to create value for all their stakeholders – i.e. conscious businesses – have extraordinarily high stock market returns in both the medium and the long term. Yes, profit-driven companies may well show a growth when compared to other profit-driven companies – but they are squarely outperformed by stakeholder-centered businesses. It is this which leads Mackey to claim that the conscious business model is a superior business model – and one which he believes will predominate in the 21st century.

Case Study

Here is an example of a conscious company we know and have worked with. Martin, the MD, runs a successful freight company – one of the hardest and most cutthroat ‘me first’ industries around. Martin’s sales manager came to him with a ‘megadeal’ that would mean huge profits for the company’s accounts. When Martin asked after the nature of the goods to be transported, he was told that it was arms.

He flatly refused the deal. As a leader invested in doing business consciously, Martin stands for particular values and won’t transport goods that are destined to be destructive in another part of the world, no matter how high the profits.

This example illustrates how conscious leaders need to have the courage to stand up for what they believe is important in the face of shareholders who may be buying for blood at a decrease in profits. Often, it may mean demonstrating strength in delaying a decision because it is not the right one for balancing the sustainability of all those involved.



What is Consciousness?

Before we go any further, let's debunk the myth and the mysticism of 'consciousness'. It's not sitting cross-legged, om-ming, at the top of a mountain or on the boardroom table, out of touch with the world and, especially, with business.

Consciousness is, most simply put, 'to be awake'. It means being aware of yourself, and expanding your awareness beyond its present limits. It means moving outwards from who you currently know yourself to be, operating outside of your present limits and into the realm of possibility – possible actions, possible creations, possible ways of being. It is the very antithesis of limitations. So, consciousness as a concept includes a way of living – awake, aware of oneself in one's circumstances and choiceful – and it also includes the notion that there is a vast space of possibility that we are not aware that we are not aware of but, with greater consciousness, can act into. This space of possibility is, as far as we can comprehend, limitless. Right now is not the time nor place to go into quantum physics, but here is where quantum physics and the limitless field of potential fits in.

The more conscious we become, the greater access we have to this field of potential to use and create with in our daily lives – as individuals or as leaders of businesses. We literally have more choice.

As humans we are, mostly, asleep – literally. We go about our daily lives awake in the physical sense, but very few of us have an awareness of ourselves while we're doing it.

In consciousness terms, this is because it's our Identity that's doing the driving in our lives. Our Identities can be seen as that with which we are identified ("my house", "my car", "my job", "my wife", "my beliefs", "my values") and our Identities literally run the show. It's not that it's wrong – Identity is very useful, if not essential, for getting on and getting into action in this world. It's just that Identity is concerned primarily with survival – physical and psychological – and when it runs the show it leads to all kinds of problems, like taking a scarcity mindset, behaving in a 'me-versus-you' way, getting attached to viewpoints and beliefs which lead to conflict and destruction of the 'other' (think: wars or even religion) and automatic, unconscious behaviour. We become the 'reactor' rather than the 'creator' in our lives.



And this extends to business as well, because leaders are people too and, like other people, they have Identities that run their show. If a leader is unaware of his (and by this I always mean 'her' as well) Identity, then he will be making unconscious decisions, reacting out of a sense of threat and fear, sometimes completely unconsciously, playing power games to further his own survival, pleasing some (and himself) at the expense of others... The list goes on. It's not wrong. It's just the nature of Identity.

And so, in consciousness terms, this simple formula is paramount:

Awareness = Choice

No awareness = No choice

The Consciousness Quotient

As recently as June 2009, a Romanian professor of psychology, Ovidiu Brazdau, coined the term 'consciousness quotient' and launched it as a concept at a conference in Hong Kong⁵.

Brazdau's view of consciousness and CQ measures the amount of access we have simultaneously to information from the vast field of consciousness – from what's possible. Someone with a high CQ can access plenty of information simultaneously, whereas someone with a lower CQ can access less information. Hence, someone with a higher CQ will usually have a broader perspective, as long as this

information is understood (here is where the link with IQ lives: IQ relates to the speed of this person's ability process information; CQ relates to their ability to access this information). This makes sense, because the less limitations we have in place, the more conscious we are, and the more we can access the limitless information from a field of possibility.

Brazdau's CQ (for which he has created a psychometric instrument to measure dimensions of consciousness) contains an assessment of one's CQ along six dimensions:

Physical (conscious of your body and physical elements in your environment)

Emotional (conscious of your feelings and any emotions)

Mental (conscious of your ideas and mental stream)

Spiritual (conscious of yourself as being part of a larger whole and your connections within it)

Social/Relationship (conscious of human relationships and the people you connect with)


Self-conscious/Self-awareness (consciousness of self; awareness of your self-awareness – of the observer who is doing the observing of yourself)

Following this thinking, any workshop aiming to raise the consciousness of its participants would look to raise this to a higher level of operating, which should, at least in this form of measurement, be reflected in higher CQ scores on Brazdau's 6 domains.


But back to what this article is all about – Conscious Business and Conscious Leadership.

Conscious Leadership


More conscious leaders have a range of advantages over their less conscious peers, all of which can be turned into a business advantage.




Better decision-making. Conscious Leaders have access to multiple sources of information simultaneously. They can see the broader picture and they can access the complexity of this information more quickly, as well as be attuned to all the implications. This is because they are less limited by their Identities which would typically react to what they see and to the information they find and form judgements and perform exclusions on it. The Conscious Leader has the ability to step back and incorporate the whole in the decisions he makes. He then enjoys the freedom to access intuition and makes quick yet balanced decisions even with imperfect information sets.




Flexibility. Akin to decision-making, a Conscious Leader is less inclined to be attached to information, decisions, or 'the way things are/were' in the organisation because his Identity is not using him to survive. This means more openness to dealing with things *as they are*, which implies a great capacity to influence situations and effect change. The opposite of this would be getting lost in one's 'story' about an event, which renders a leader powerless to cause a full effect of change.




Authenticity. A Conscious Leader is more 'gettable' to others. Because he has high levels of self-awareness, and is less clouded by his Identity (i.e. acting unconsciously, without insight), he experiences the freedom and flexibility to create himself as he chooses: he is able to take a stand for what he wants to create in the organisation and *be* this stand because he has the flexibility of being to do so, which is an inspiring thing to be around. It makes his communication style more impactful and clear, less sabotaged by his 'story' about himself. This is a great recipe for clear communication and raised productivity, as well as setting a culture across the organisation.



Source of Creation. Alongside his flexibility of being, he acts as the source for the things he wants to happen – he doesn't wait for circumstances to provide and he is never the victim. He creates, rather than reacts. We are talking here about personal power, rather than using force to drive things through: this is a product of leadership *being* rather than leadership *doing*. He holds himself accountable to his word and acts with integrity, thus increasing his power to create and, as a natural continuation, holds his teams accountable too. This way of being positively impacts his teams, clients, shareholders and the whole culture he sets for the company.



Acting for the Whole. A Conscious Leader considers all players in the organisation he leads and acts in a way that supports the balance of the whole. This includes all constituents in the business: its people, its customers, its shareholders and the community/society at large. He makes decisions balancing the interests of all these stakeholders, with a deep knowing that they are interlinked and that a change in one will effect a change in others. He puts 'purpose' and 'happiness' first in the organisation, rather than profit first. He is synergistic and seeks win-win outcomes where the whole can benefit, and he does this from a place of consciousness, not from self-serving or looking good.



Evolution. Conscious Leaders are self-aware enough to know that they can always explore their own limitations further. They are invested in constantly expanding outwards, moving into new realms of possibility, creating through their intentions, their speech and their integrity, always with the whole in mind. As leaders, they set the tone for their organisations of continual self-examination and evolution. The competitive advantages of this over other, slower, more unwieldy and more entrenched companies, is obvious.

+ Summary

In this article we explore why conscious business is better (more profit, for one thing, but also more sustainability, joy, energy and purpose), what consciousness is (essentially, more awareness and, through this, more choice), how this is measured via the Consciousness Quotient, and what some of the qualities of a conscious leader are.

In a world where leadership theories are ten a penny, we need to be careful not succumb to the 'next great thing' temptation. Where conscious leadership has strength is that it deals in context not content: it is not offering simply another formula to apply to oneself that proclaims it is competitively better than all other formulas, but rather it represents the capacity to step outside of oneself, observe, see oneself in context, and have the power to choose what one wants to be and do next, which may follow any of the other popular leadership thinking models – if one so chooses.

Ultimately, it's about authenticity and by this we mean that the clouds of one's identity – those habits, unconscious patterns and behaviours that cast a shadow over us and cause a barrier to be erected between us and others – is diminished. In its place, we are free to be light, choiceful, powerful, coming from the full awareness of who we are and how to create powerfully into a leadership context.

Some of the qualities we will see in such a leader is the ability to observe thoughts and emotions arising, as they arise, even fairly intense ones, yet the ability to derive a course of action that is still in service of a win-win outcome. Similarly, this would mean acting in alignment with one's vision, even every fiber of oneself *being* one's vision (what could be more compelling than that?) or creating peace rather than conflict (even while thoughts and feelings might be screaming for a different, more reactive path of action).

For leaders such as these, there are some pretty attractive qualities to enjoy:

- Charisma
- Aliveness
- Sharpness (the capacity for new thought)
- Creativity (the space for seeing productively not reproductively)
- Contentment
- Stillness (in the face of chaos)
- Great observation skills
- Resilience
- Courage and Edginess.

For more information and a discussion on how to develop these qualities in yourself and your organisation, contact ginahayden@sphereconsulting.org.

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About the Author



Gina Hayden is based in South Africa and London (UK), and divides her time between clients in Africa, the Middle East and Europe. For the past twenty years she has been helping companies across the world develop their people. She specialises in mending and building positive relationships in companies, increasing cohesion and alignment in teams and improving their dynamics, and aligning whole organisations around their culture, change, values and future direction. She designs and runs workshops on creating excellent client relationships and having powerful, productive business conversations that get results. She coaches senior leaders and executives in the art of leading more consciously. She is passionate about the notion

of conscious leadership which she sees as imperative in finding a new way to lead organisations and change the way we do business and influence the world. She believes deeply in our ability as human beings to become more conscious and self-aware and to free ourselves from the habitual and often hidden patterns that keep us playing small. Gina's professional qualifications include an MSc in Counselling Psychology, an additional diploma in psychotherapy, qualified use of psychometric tools and international accreditation with the ICF (International Coach Federation) as an accredited Consciousness Coach and Professional Certified Coach. Contact Gina at ginahayden@sphereconsulting.org