



LAS HUAJATOLLAS/The Spanish Peaks/
Brenda Bartel

CONTINUUM OF LEADERSHIP GROWTH

ABSTRACT

Drawn from decades of experience and observation, this continuum creates a landscape of leadership. It focuses on three leadership areas: individual work, organizational work and spirit work. This is a capstone document from a long career in the leadership field.

Isabel Lopez

I have long been interested in the role leadership plays in creating a more just and caring world and how our institutions support or hinder that possibility. The best leaders look beyond self-interest and their own power to using power that serves to make the lives of others better. To that end, I am an advocate for the servant as leader philosophy laid out by Robert Greenleaf. You will find me referring to him in some places. The Continuum of Leadership Growth model, however, is about leadership in general.

This model is an observation of leadership and leaders and offers some strategies that I hope move leaders to become better. We often replace leadership development with management development or career development or team development. Sometimes we even think they are the same thing. In this model I have tried to remain true to leadership development—the leader is the tool or perhaps even the tap root which then makes growth and movement happen.

I created this model while working with a leadership program going through an Outward-Bound experience in Colorado in 1990's. The program was multicultural, multidisciplinary, and multi organizational. In the ensuing years, I added to my knowledge of this subject. The continuum is informed by work in many organizations over the years. I recently completed, added, and wrote an explanation. I generally write from experience and observation from decades of working in institutions, large and small, working in communities and with individuals. It is undergirded by knowledge about leadership, management, people, group process, and energy.

The model has withstood the test of time. Some might call it a legacy piece. I just knew I needed to complete it enough to stimulate thinking and action. Whoever uses this will also add. In the [Song of the Bird](#), Anthony de Mello tells this story.

A disciple once complained,

“You tell us stories, but you never reveal their meaning to us”

Said the master,

“How would you like it if someone offered you fruit and masticated it before giving it to you?”

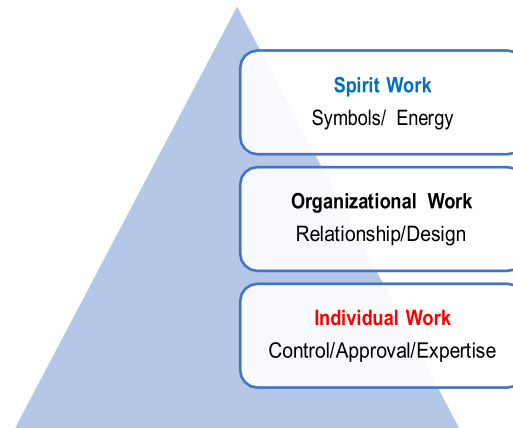
With this work, I offer you the opportunity to do your own chewing.

The continuum starts with the essence of the leader and how that essence manifests in the characteristic others see. The continuum then moves to the impact on others. I have highlighted conflict as an impact due to its potentially destructive and traumatic affect. There are other impacts such as communication, quality of work and organizational culture. These are not part of this model, but they could be.

There is and probably always has been, much discussion around 'leadership development'. The words point to movement—getting better, doing better, being better. This continuum charts that path. If one is speaking about leadership development, it takes place in three levels. It begins at the individual level, progresses to the organizational level and at the highest level, it is the work of the spirit—the animating force, as Robert Greenleaf names 'spirit'.

The characteristics that define each level are shown in this diagram. The growth strategies point to the work that needs to be done. --the work of leadership. I write and talk about leadership because it is the institutional currency that can make the world 'more just and caring' in the words of Robert K. Greenleaf, father of the modern servant leadership movement.

You will note, there are several logical divisions on this leadership development path. First the work is divided into three areas as depicted:



Individual, organizational and spirit. It is further organized into 3 more sections: 1. Who are you, (essence), 2. How are others affected, (impact), and 3. How do you become better? (growth strategy).

These definitions will help guide you through the model

- Leadership Essence—The essence of the person—who they are in the leadership capacity. It could well be true elsewhere also.
- Leadership Characteristic—The behavior manifested in their work. You can see/feel this.
- Leadership Role—What they ‘do’.
- Group Response--How the group reflects its leader.
- Teams Response—How they work.
- Conflict Response—How the group responds when disagreements burn hot; the energy that emerges and the power that is used.
- Development Practices— Areas to focus on if growth is to occur.
- Questions—A place to start.

You can enter the model horizontally or vertically. But in the final look, you should think of it as a whole. If you enter horizontally, follow the headers across and you will get an understanding of the leader with that essence. For example, the control-oriented leader has an essence of anger and fear in different degrees. It may range from being a petty tyrant to just being a mess that fears making a mistake and therefore micromanages. This then is dealt with by focusing on structure; rules for everything which is intended to give a larger sense of control. The group then mirrors this and becomes fearful and angry. Conflict, when it erupts, is loud, bitter, and potentially personal. For the leader, who is feared, to move beyond this essence they probably need to focus on emotional growth. A coach, mentor or guide could offer resources in this area or ask emotion-based questions like: what caused you to anger? Why do you think that is? Is there a better way.? How do you think the group was affected? How are you feeling? Etc.?

If you enter vertically, you will see the progression of development. For example, start at the bottom row and move up. One would work on understanding their emotions. Edward deBono says emotions are the quality control of thinking. It is best to understand so one can know self and develop awareness. From there one can show vulnerability and learn to trust. In other words, this individual work leads us to being fully human. We then start relating to others and with trust, more autonomy in work is allowed. With the foundation laid, the organization becomes more effective, and improvement is obvious. We begin to see things clearly. We can focus then on higher-level spirit development—using intuition, foresight, and visualization until, as a leader one becomes more whole. Those served, become more whole also.

CONTINUUM OF LEADERSHIP GROWTH

<i>Descriptors</i>			<i>Impact</i>			<i>Growth Strategy</i>	
Leadership Essence (Who they are)	Leadership Characteristics (Their behavior)	Leadership Role (What they do)	Group Response (Reflection of leader)	Teams Response (How they work)	Conflict Response (Power used)	Development Practices (The way forward)	
Being	Energy	Mirror	Theirs	Seamless /for the greater good	Healed	Love others/Leading to entheos	Spirit work
Meaning	Symbols	Philosophy	High functioning	Collaborative, proactive and creative	Not Personal	Use stories, art, poetry, metaphors, Intuition, use relationships between seemingly unrelated things	
Process	Design	Planning	Accountability	Coordinating	Open	Develop clarity	Organizational work
Connection	Relationship	Concern	Appreciation	Cooperative	Can be needy	Allow autonomy	
Ego	Expertise	Knowledge/Techniques	Intellectual	Limited in performance	Low/none	Trust others	Individual work
Insecurity	Approval	Superior	Dependence	Waiting for instruction/approval	Unexpressed	Show vulnerability	
Fear/Anger	Control	Structure	Anger/Fear	Constricted/tentative	Loud/bitter or sabotaging	Express and understand emotions	

KEY:

Spirit work: BLUE

Organizational work: ORANGE

Individual work: GREEN

<i>Growth Strategies</i>
Development Practices: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS
<u>Love others/Leading to entheos</u> Are you intimately familiar with your own triggers? Do you 'know thyself' .? Can you see the good in others regardless of their behavior?
<u>Use stories, art, poetry, metaphors, intuition</u> Can you help others develop meaning because of who you are? Can you leave the analysis to the specific task and use other tools to help people grow? Are your frameworks sound? How did your listening transform you?, Others?
<u>Develop clarity</u> What is the noblest outcome? What is your liberating vision? What do you stand for? What is your credo?
<u>Allow autonomy</u> What happens if they fail? Are your delegated instructions clear? Do you give, parameters, outcomes and timelines? Can you let go? What did you hear when you listened?
<u>Trust others</u> Do you like others? Do they like you? Why or why not? What would it take for you to trust them? How do you get there? What do you risk in order to trust? Do you listen more than speak? How can you become trustworthy?
<u>Show vulnerability</u> What are you afraid of? What is the worst that could happen? Share your fear—out loud.
<u>Express and understand emotions.</u> How did you contribute to this problem/issue? What could you have done differently in the following areas—mental, physical, emotional or spiritual? How do you think others feel? How do you feel? What is the better outcome? How can you practice listening?

Each of these levels of development require intention and our best efforts. The result of engaging or NOT engaging in this development shows up in individual well-being and in organizational culture and performance and in whether one lives a life of meaning. Those, of, course, are choices we make. I offer these words, again from Robert Greenleaf, on entheos. They come from his essay “Education and Maturity”.

Entheos - The Spirit Which Defines and Motivates

Entheos - *The power of actuating one who is inspired, while enthusiasm is seen as its less profound, more surface aspect. It lifts people above the prosaic and gives them a sense of timelessness. It is the prod of conscience that keeps one open to knowledge, so that one can be both aware and sensitive.*

The Ultimate Test of Entheos - *An intuitive feeling of oneness, of wholeness, of rightness; but not necessarily comfort or ease*

If you look at this whole, you will see that the journey of the leader is one of healing, self, and others. That healing of ourselves and others must be done with much love. De Mello, again in The Song of the Bird, tells the story of a very difficult man who was constantly told he had to change This was to no avail. He was deeply hurt when his best friend gave him the same advice. When his friend finally said, “don’t change, I love you. just the way you are”, he began to change. This story, to me, illustrates the care we must take with the human spirit. Robert Greenleaf in his Servant as Leader essay also tells us, ‘In the end, all that matters is love and friendship. ‘

We are all builders— wise leadership builds for better—perhaps we can strive for the top line on this continuum. Why? Because we care about the human spirit and the world in which It resides. The higher level may sound idealistic and maybe is—but what a marvelous pinnacle to reach for in the leadership journey. Would you want to reach lower?

“Wisdom uses intellect, knows heart, and understands spirit.

This is the essence of wise leadership”.

Isabel Lopez

Thanks to Dr.Audrey Alvarado, Richard Smith, and Meg Kelly for their thoughts and assistance.

ADDENDUM 1/28/2022

After review and feedback, I have added a few comments to help others make better use of this model. This addendum answers some questions that have been raised.

Who can use this construct and how?

- Students of leadership: Lays out a leadership landscape and deepens understanding of who leaders are , their impact and their development needs.
- Those who teach and share knowledge and skills about leadership, organizations and people: Creates a map for this learning.
- Coaches: Is a guide for client development.
- Individuals: Assists them to see leadership whole and create their own development map.
- Curious people: Allows them to engage with ideas.

It is not a step-by-step document. Rather it is a map, look at it whole and then look at specifics, then apply to your work and world.

Examples for each of the 'work ' areas; individual, organizational, and spirit:

This is a hard question because nothing in this model stands alone. Metaphorically it is like a tree. The individual work can be the trunk, the organizational work becomes the branches and the spirit work can be thought of as the roots the tree. They work together to produce fruit and flower.

1. *Individual Work:* This work focuses on building self-awareness so one can see beyond themselves. One reaches for emotional health in order not to harm others. Power is often gained through control, ego or expertise and it used for self—that can harm others. Therefore, the core of this work is to conquer the need for gaining power over others.

BEHAVIORAL EXAMPLE	ACTIONS
Distrusts and diminishes people	Practice involving and listening to others. Allow autonomy for others to learn and do.
Angers easily	Reflect on the source of the anger. What are the triggers? Trace them back.
Takes things personally	Learn to believe in self and others. Practice seeing things from other person's perspective.

These examples are for the person at the individual/control level. See development questions for more guidance.

2. *Organizational Work:* Those who do this well understand the need to and practice of sharing power. This leads them and those they work with to perform at the highest levels—not without error, but with excellence. It is leadership work which is beyond skills development. An example of how to work with the continuum in this area follows:

CREATE your own case study for analysis, decision making and action. Follow these steps:

1. Create your problem statement, for example; There seems to be some unresolved conflict in the team.
2. WHO are the players?
3. WHAT is happening? Look at behaviors.
4. WHERE is this happening?
5. WHEN does this happen?
6. Analyze your role. What is your part in this? What might you have contributed to the problem?

REVIEW the continuum focusing on the organizational work areas.

What and which boxes in the continuum relate to the problem?

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Process	Design	Planning	Accountability	Coordinating	Open	Develop clarity	Organizational work
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DECIDE what to do.

In reviewing the continuum and development questions, find words that might guide an approach.

3. *Spirit work*: If we think of spirit as the animating force, leadership then focuses on larger things. Like what really matters, are we just and do we love others. The effect of the leader is not only the work products but the healing of organizations, communities and society. This task began at the individual level, moved to the organizational level and now resides at the spirit level. This is the root that gives nourishment to our metaphorical tree: it takes in nutrients that feed the trunk and branches which then allow for fruit and flower. We can see and celebrate fruit and flower but seldom celebrate roots. Yes without them the tree will not stand. So it is with spirit, unseen and uncelebrated yet, critical to life. We feel spirit: things just work. There is easy joy and lightness. In my own life, when I lose my sense of humor, I know I am not allowing space for spirit and that will affect my work and other people. And in the long run, my life. Our work in this area is and probably will always be imperfect. It will not however, traumatize nor destroy us. Lack of spirit work can lead to selfishness, narrow vision and lack of meaning.

Suggestions:

- Look for the good.
- Laugh often; with others and at yourself.
- Give others some space to grow.
- Affirm the roots.
- Always always , look at your own deficiencies first. Take stock.
- Reflect often.
- Make your overall goal ' to make better in all ways.'

Oh, and laugh often.

About Isabel Lopez

A former corporate executive with years of experience, Isabel supervised hundreds of people and managed multi-million-dollar budgets. Her formal education is in business administration and her experience includes marketing, strategic planning, operations, employee assessment, quality measurements, labor relations, supervision, management training and organizational development. She began Lopez Leadership Services through which she had a long association with the Robert Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. She was a member of their Academy faculty for 10 years teaching the Foundations of Servant Leadership Course, which she developed.

She is known as a storyteller and a wise woman.