

## How To Become An Inspiring Leader?

Cold cannot be understood unless you have had the pleasure of living back-to-back in two states like Michigan and Massachusetts as I did. One unusually cold day even for Boston I was eating lunch in the UMass Boston student union. Striking up a conversation with what appeared to be an older student, an opportunity to learn the difference between charisma and inspiration appeared.

We exchanged life particulars when suddenly the conversation became serious. He sized me up as a suburban African-American, coddled and protected from the realities of the street, living in Dorchester, trying to deliver some type of intellectually impotent Christianity as a solution to the real problems facing poor people in a racist city without any hope .

This was no student, something I didn't discover until the end of the conversation. He went on to say a number of things, but what I remember most clearly was when he said, "I can take you places where you will see real life, addicts who have repeatedly injected themselves with drugs using the same dirty needles until their limbs are swelled up with infections so toxic their arms are nearly twice their original size."

Known for my extemporaneous debating skills this winter day his voice of experience silenced me. He was not mean, nor was he threatening or in any way unpleasant. On that day he was pointing out to me the difference between charisma and inspiration.

I was entering a city plagued by the pain of poverty and racism selling personality, attempting to use relatability and charm to win people over. He was on the street working with people, living their pain, freeing them from the social traps and prisons cutting off their hope.

He was leading with inspiration. I was attempting to lead with charisma. Humbled by this unforgettable experience, walking away ashamed, I have never been the same.

### Stop Making Excuses For Being A Bore

Boring leader is an oxymoron or at least it should be along with boring spouse, boring parent, boring teacher, boring professor, and of course boring person. Leaders above all should be inspiring. *Decide When Boring Something is missing?*

As already discussed, there is a difference between inspiration and charisma. An understanding of this difference is essential in the battle against boring. There are too many who have decided they lack the charisma gene so *(how can they be inspiring?)* This is merely an excuse to continue practicing the dark art of boring. *Harry!!! Potter!!!*

What makes leaders inspiring? Passion for their purpose ignites a fire within for which there is no extinguisher. The easiest thing for the dispassionate, aimless, tedious, and boring leader to do is rationalize his or her lack of motivation by calling these inspiring leaders charismatic, insinuating their capacity to move hearts is a gift rather than the product of humble learning, hard work, and an emotionally stirring personal example. *→ Boring Needs An Excuse Not To Change*

Discounting the passionate fires of purpose burning in the hearts of the inspired these masters of boredom resist the deep work necessary to awaken their own fire, preferring to conceal their truth which the descriptive words of Henry David Thoreau exposed when he wrote,

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."<sup>1</sup>

*Boring Is Desperate*  
1) Dispassionate  
2) Aimless  
3) Tedious  
4) Desperate

<sup>1</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. The Portable Thoreau (Portable Library) (p. 203). Penguin Publishing Group. desperation.

Why are they Incapable → More Unwilling?  
① Unwilling  
② Incapable

Incapable of summoning the fires of passion for purpose, these boring leaders seek to extinguish the fires of those who do not live similarly tedious lives, lives Thoreau also describes as being "so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them."<sup>2</sup>

↳ factitious

Artificially Created or Developed

↳ superfluously  
unnecessary, not needed

Charisma may be a gift from above limited to a select few, but inspiration is the fruit of a well lived life. Boring leaders should accept this truth and get about the business of changing their lives rather than making excuses, for who knows that we are in our position of leadership like Esther, "for such a time as this."<sup>3</sup>

### The Power of an Inspiring Life

Tomorrow I wake up and go from being a boy with Down syndrome to an Ironman

Chris Nikic

Chris Nikic is inspiring. Des Bieler tells his story in the Washington Post article,

["Trailblazing triathlete isn't letting Down syndrome prevent him from becoming an Ironman."](#)

Nikic became the first person with Down syndrome to complete a full, 140.6-mile Ironman Triathlon, making it through an event in Panama City Beach, Fla., in 16 hours 46 minutes 9 seconds. That was good enough to get him a [listing](#) in Guinness World Records and a salute from the Special Olympics, with which he has been involved for years.

Chris is not alone in his ability to inspire. Bieler tells the story within the story when he describes "Nikic's journey to an unprecedented feat began with a father who did not want his son's condition to be a hindrance."

<sup>2</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. The Portable Thoreau (Portable Library) (p. 197). Penguin Publishing Group.

<sup>3</sup> The Holy Bible English Standard Version (ESV) (Kindle Locations 15692-15693). Crossway Bibles.

The impact of the Nikic family was felt by Shane Facticeau, the Ironman Group's chief operating officer who believes Chris personifies the Ironman spirit.

He's pushing the boundaries of what's possible. He's putting himself out there, and that's something people need to understand," Facticeau continued. "He's taking the opportunity, and there's always risk in that there's the chance of success or failure. We love to see people of all shapes and sizes do that."

As a parent of son's with special needs this story resonates and inspires, but it is not limited to the disability community, because encased in this story of emotional endurance fueled by personal inspiration is a lesson for us all, which is inspiration is not about talent, it is about the type of life we lead.

### **Inspiring or Charismatic?**

"A second-class intellect. But a first-class temperament!"

Geoffrey C. Ward, A First Class Temperament

Washington D.C. is filled with historic landmarks, locations where history turned, many of which are not the White House or Capitol Buildings. One of them is the city of Georgetown. The location where on March 8, 1933 a retired Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes at age ninety-two met newly elected President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Justice Holmes and President Roosevelt visited over tea. Their meeting lasted for about a half hour before the president left, then as insightfully recorded by Geoffrey C. Ward in his book A First Class Temperament, "Holmes considered for a moment before rendering his verdict on this latest President Roosevelt."

What was the verdict of Justice Holmes about Roosevelt, "A second-class intellect. But a first-class temperament!"

Mr. Ward, who writes history with a fiction writers attention to detail explains the observation by Justice Holmes.

Holmes was a shrewd judge of men as well as laws. There were always wiser men and women than Franklin Roosevelt in American public life, people who were better informed, more consistent, less devious. But there were none whose power to inspire both love and loathing was so great, none whose political success or apparent self-assurance exceeded his.

Geoffrey C. Ward, A First Class Temperament

President Roosevelt was an inspiring leader. His ability to inspire was often mistaken for the more superficial quality of charisma. A mistake made by President Herbert Hoover right before Roosevelt defeated him to become president for the first of three terms.

Herbert Hoover was a proud man who despised Franklin Roosevelt for some of the same reasons Al Smith did. Like Smith, Hoover had earned, through hard work and applied intelligence, everything he attained in life. He couldn't see that Roosevelt had earned anything, and with the smugness of the self-made man he assumed Roosevelt was lacking in character and ability. He didn't deny that Roosevelt possessed a certain charisma, but he considered charisma badly overrated—especially when it caused those who came into contact with Roosevelt to fall for the arguments he was making against Hoover's administration.

H.W. Brands, Traitor to His Class

Herbert Hoover "assumed Roosevelt was lacking in character and ability," because in his mind success had come to him too easily (never mind Roosevelt was wheelchair bound due to polio).

Hoover delivered the typical insult of the uninspiring toward the inspiring, "He didn't deny that Roosevelt possessed a certain charisma, but he considered charisma badly overrated," yet reading on in H.W. Brands Traitor to His Class we understand the motive behind Hoover's charisma label, he was irritated when Roosevelt used his charisma, "especially when it caused

those who came into contact with Roosevelt to fall for the arguments he was making against Hoover's administration."

Justice Holmes looked at a man capable of influencing and inspiring then credited his temperament. Herbert Hoover looked at a competitor capable of influencing and inspiring then labeled him as charismatic.

~~Hoovers~~ misidentification of inspiration as charisma is not uncommon, especially in those who lack both. ~~✗~~

Why is this important? Charisma and inspiration are not the same thing, but we often confuse the two. Let's concede that charisma is a gift, a form of talent, an infectiousness, an ability to attract attention, neither good nor evil, but let's distinguish it from the more important inspire.

### Understanding Charisma

**Charisma:** *compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others.*  
Oxford English Dictionary

Distinguishing between charisma and inspiration is as simple as reading the dictionary where charisma is described as a personality trait. Jeremy C. Young provides academic context and definition to the term charisma in "The Age of Charisma."

*For this reason, it may be preferable to use the anachronistic term "charisma" to describe the phenomenon in its totality. The ancient Greeks first used "charisma" to denote a special ability given by the gods; St. Paul used the word in a similar way but cited Yahweh as the ultimate source of the ability. The theologian Rudolf Sohm revived the term and introduced it into modern scholarship in an 1888 volume on church history.*

Jeremy C. Young, The Age of Charisma

Mr. Young relies on the work of Max Weber to explain the modern manifestations of charisma.

*It was the German sociologist Max Weber, though, in the late 1910s and especially in his posthumously published *Economy and Society* (1922), who decoupled charisma from religion, and gave it its modern meaning.*

Jeremy C. Young, *The Age of Charisma*

According to Young it was personal experience which drew Weber's attention to charisma. Born in 1864 he "experienced the phenomenon of personal magnetism firsthand."

...Weber lived in a society controlled by leaders who wielded immense power over popular ideas and culture – though many of these German figures, such as Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, were monarchical or dictatorial rather than democratic.

Jeremy C. Young, *The Age of Charisma*

Why refer to the academic work of scholars like Young and Weber? Problems of understanding are almost always rooted in our insistence in listening to our own experiences, rather than consulting the historical record, which academics do better than anyone, bringing us to the reason for this intellectual journey, Weber's clear and substantial definition of charisma.

He defined the term as "a certain quality of an individualized personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities ... on the basis of [which] the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader.'"

Jeremy C. Young, *The Age of Charisma*

Herein lies the problem with charisma. An individual without substance or expertise can become a leader on the basis of a personality trait, a gift like athleticism or intelligence, unearned,

untrained, regardless of character or experience, all because of appearances, a problem well documented in the Myth of the Strong Leader.

Moreover, the idea that charisma is a special quality a leader is born with needs to be severely qualified. To a large extent, it is followers who bestow charisma on leaders, when that person seems to embody the qualities they are looking for.

Archie Brown, The Myth of the Strong Leader

All of this is personal for me, in my youth leadership was very much about appearances. I imitated personality traits of leaders who received attention and respect without pursuing the substance and experience that come from doing the deep work of character building and motive purifying necessary to lead. → *Shut ups*

What is more, I ignored leaders of substance, instead giving the most respect to those who were as clueless about the dangers of charismatic leadership as I was. Looking back, I realize I chose to be mentored in the superficiality of personality driven leadership, and until I was able to get space, freedom to think about what I was doing, it was impossible for me to understand exactly what was happening. *likes!!!!*

What do I know now? Charisma is a personality trait, sometimes a natural gift, at other times [Pretend] an actor's affect used to give the appearance of leadership without any substance. *Don't actually know how to lead*

While it is undeniable that charisma can be beneficial, the dangers outweigh the benefits for leaders, because more often than not charisma absent emotional maturity, spiritual awareness, and intellectual depth merely inspires devotion to the individual rather than building the institution where the leader leads.

The sacred text of scripture provides incisive warning about charisma in Proverbs 31:30 (NIV), "Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting," instructively teaching us there are no short cuts to the enduring qualities necessary for healthy and effective leadership.

### Understanding Inspiration

Before we describe what we see as the crucial difference between the early shapers of visionary companies versus the comparison companies (for we do think there is a crucial difference), we'd like to share an interesting corollary: A high-profile, charismatic style is absolutely not required to successfully shape a visionary company. Indeed, we found that some of the most significant chief executives in the history of the visionary companies did not have the personality traits of the archetypal high-profile, charismatic visionary leader.

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, Built to Last

Jim Collins is inspiring. Listening to him teach in person is to experience a force of nature uncommon to academics. When he writes about charisma being unnecessary to build visionary and enduring companies it is not from the ivory tower of boring academic research, but an understanding that inspiration and charisma are two completely different things.

Let's take a look at the definitions of our two words:

**Charisma:** *compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others.*

**Inspire:** *fill (someone) with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially to do something creative*

Oxford English Dictionary

Charisma is personality driven, utilizing whatever gifts it may have at its disposal to 'be attractive' or 'charm' all for the purpose of creating a devoted following for an individual or cause, with the danger being it is the charisma not necessarily the cause which has produced this devotion.

Charisma vs Cause

Inspiration is different. When we inspire we provide those we lead with the internal motivation to take action, it is devoid of personality, but is instead focused on the creative endeavor we are pursuing, be it political, spiritual, economic or otherwise.

*Superiorly Imparted*

Charisma makes us dependent. Inspiration empowers us. When we are inspired we are capable of recreating our sense of faith and vision without the charismatic individual.

The most effective leaders will learn to inspire. They develop 5 characteristics that allow them to inspire, empower, and make those around them better without seeking the credit or to be the focus of all that takes place or is built. This sounds attractive and simple, but it is neither, it requires transformation, so let's take a look at these 5 transformational stages.

## Emotional Maturity

Don't run from tests and hardships, brothers and sisters. As difficult as they are, you will ultimately find joy in them; if you embrace them, your faith will blossom under pressure and teach you true patience as you endure. And true patience brought on by endurance will equip you to complete the long journey and cross the finish line—mature, complete, and wanting nothing.

James 1:2 (Holy Bible, Voice Translation)

Emotional maturity takes time, tests, and hardship. Whether we run from or embrace these transformative moments will determine our capacity for growth, our ability to increase in emotional maturity.

Emotional discovery is all the rage in the business community, which is a good thing, but without the depth of spirituality found in the Holy Bible, a true and deep understanding of our very necessary emotional journey will be elusive. Bible Beyond Religion ←

Spiritual people perceive the possibilities in difficult moments. Something deep down inside of their soul stirs them, keeps them moving forward, confident this too shall pass, and when it passes, they know their future will be brighter than their past.

Until we learn to embrace the process of becoming emotionally mature it will be impossible for us to develop the complete character necessary to be an inspiring leader.

## Sense of Destiny

I think he grew into a company builder. I know that is what he was worried about doing. He knew how to build insanely great products. He had to learn how to build an insanely great company and I believe he did that.

[Jim Collins, CNN Business](#)

When we learn to take the journey toward emotional maturity, we become capable of pursuing our destiny. We are in my view endowed with a sense of destiny at birth. Developing emotional maturity gives us the internal strength and tenacity to pursue this destiny.

Steve Jobs is considered controversial by some, but for me he was merely human, possessing strengths and weaknesses, liked by some disliked by others, made special by his pursuit of destiny, what he described in his now legendary [Stanford Commencement Address](#) as connecting the dots.

The connecting of those dots is described perfectly in a [CNN Business interview](#) with Jim Collins where he told the story of how Fortune magazine asked him to evaluate Steve Jobs as a company builder by saying, "How do you evaluate Steve Jobs as a company builder? Wrong question. How do you evaluate Beethoven or Picasso as a company builder? He is an industrial Beethoven and we have yet to see a ninth symphony!"

This interview is wide ranging. Mr. Collins describes cold-calling Mr. Jobs to teach his class on company building in the late 80s, and how Jobs reminded Collins that he had been fired from his last company as he questioned why he was being asked to teach.

Mr. Collins talked about the fact that during this time people laughed at Jobs for his failure, that most people had written him off, but as he spoke with the students Collins realized, "This man is never going to stop, and he was never going to give up."

After Mr. Jobs resurrected Apple from death to dominance and after his death Collins said about Steve Jobs, 'what impressed me is not the products but himself.' Jim Collins the astute academic evaluator of company building was impressed by the fact that Steve Jobs had weathered storms, grown in maturity, becoming more than a builder of insanely great products making the transformation into an insanely great company builder, because of his incredible sense of destiny.

## Spiritual Awareness

Awe is the awareness of transcendent meaning, of a spiritual suggestiveness of reality, an allusiveness to transcendent meaning. The world in its grandeur is full of a spiritual radiance, for which we have neither name nor concept.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

**Spiritual Awareness** is the acknowledgement that there is more to this world than what we see. If we find ourselves without a sense of destiny, the likely reason is a lack of spiritual awareness.

Abraham Joshua Heschel explains our daily experience with the spiritual in *God in Search of Man*.

The heavens declare the glory of God. Man is confronted with a world that alludes to something beyond itself, to a truth beyond experience. It is the allusiveness to a meaning which is not of this world, and it is that allusiveness which conveys to us the awareness of a spiritual dimension of reality, the relatedness of being to transcendent meaning.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

Courage is required to pursue meaning beyond this world, to allow an “awareness of a spiritual dimension of reality” to provide us with the transcendent meaning that illuminates our path inspiring a sense of destiny.

An underestimated quality of Steve Jobs, and one that made his transformation from product to company builder possible was his spiritual awareness. Anyone who cares to read Walter Isaacson’s definitive biography of Jobs will come to this unavoidable conclusion, the journeys into the spiritual realm he took, and how it informed his view of company building.

Throughout his career, Jobs liked to see himself as an enlightened rebel pitted against evil empires, a Jedi warrior or Buddhist samurai fighting the forces of darkness. IBM was his perfect foil. He cleverly cast the upcoming battle not as a mere business competition, but as a spiritual struggle.

When I hear the constant criticism of Silicon Valley for our lack of ethical compass, what occurs to me is our company builders have copied much from Jobs without embracing what is arguably his most distinctive quality, to see beyond software and hardware to the beauty, elegance, and profundity of spirituality.

### Intellectual Depth

Likewise, we're asking you to see the success of visionary companies—at least in part—as coming from underlying processes and fundamental dynamics embedded in the organization and not primarily the result of a single great idea or some great, all-knowing, godlike visionary who made great decisions, had great charisma, and led with great authority. If you're involved in building and managing a company, we're asking you to think less in terms of being a brilliant product visionary or seeking the personality characteristics of charismatic leadership, and to think more in terms of being an organizational visionary and building the characteristics of a visionary company.

Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, Built to Last (Good to Great)

Intellectual depth is not so much about intelligence as our capacity to think. Countless intelligent even brilliant people become leaders without learning how to think beyond themselves, to think about building a visionary company, which if one were to read Collins has a number of characteristics more important than mere profitability or growth.

Visionary companies are built by visionary people who have the intellectual depth to probe their own motives for doing what they are doing, to consider the impact of their company on society not merely their customers, to build beyond their lifetime creating generational value to the employees and community.

### Passion for your Purpose

My passion has been to build an enduring company where people were motivated to make great products. Everything else was secondary. Sure, it was great to make a profit, because that was what allowed you to make great products. But the products, not the profits, were the motivation. Sculley flipped these priorities to where the goal was to make money. It's a subtle difference, but it ends up meaning everything: the people you hire, who gets promoted, what you discuss in meetings.

Walter Isaacson, Steve Jobs

When an individual develops emotional maturity, a sense of destiny, and intellectual depth a passion for their purpose will become their primary focus. The fires of those passions will burn away every distraction.

This does not mean everything becomes about building a company. One can see from a close examination of Steve Jobs that his family and close relationships meant the world to him, they too shared his passion for his purpose, and in many cases developed their own personal sense of purpose as well, which is exactly what an inspiring leader should produce in others.

Debbie  
↓  
Ms. Ferguson  
But  
Many  
Disagree

### Conclusion

In my lifetime no year has been as turbulent, stressful, distracting, discouraging, uncertain, destabilizing, or difficult as 2020, and yet, in the midst of these storms, one thing seems true to me, which is this fact, almost always in history the darkest times are when the light has the opportunity to shine brightest. *Harry Potter*

What better time than now for anyone with a desire to make a difference to embrace the opportunity and challenge of becoming an inspiring leader. This is my choice. I hope you will join me.