

# The Crucibles of integral Leadership

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Abraham Lincoln defined leadership as a growth process, which encourages people to act from "the better angels of their nature". Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King jr., Mohandas Gandhi, Rachel Carson as well as many leaders without fame, have demonstrated the power of such leadership. In the process, they changed the world around them. Imagine what could happen in our world if all leaders were as purposeful, meaningful, ethical, integral? What would happen if we were developing in others and ourselves some of these same qualities? Even 10%!

At HEC Montreal (the oldest and largest Business School in Canada), we have started a large research project involving one hundred researchers around the world over a ten-year period. This project explores practical, yet profound questions about this more integral type of leadership. Three fundamental questions guide our work. What are leaders who are considered to be operating at a more mature level of development doing differently? How have they achieved this maturity? How can we help future leaders to undergo such development? In this project we will study one hundred leaders who are considered, across centuries, the cultures and the religions, to be among the most effective and ethical. We will publish a short book on each of them. We are calling these books "leadographies". We are starting with Mother Teresa and Mohandas Gandhi, and then reading across these 100 cases in order to find common patterns. We share below some of our emergent findings.

How do Integral Leaders Differ From Other Leaders?

*Follow the higher self with moral courage*

Integral leaders defy the current definition of leadership. One of the most accepted definitions is that a leader has followers. The evidence that we uncovered is different: integral leaders are less concerned about having followers than they are to be the follower of their higher selves. As integral leaders they follow something that is well beyond themselves. For example, Dorothy Day, editor of the Catholic Worker newspaper, deliberately went against her readership by condemning in print the fact that the Catholic Church backed up the dictator Franco during the Spanish Civil War. She lost three fourths of her readership. Martin Luther King did the same thing when he expanded beyond his black population base to an overall critique of the Vietnam War. Some have seen this as poor leadership! We do not know many CEOs who would stand against their company on a crucial issue. And yet, when we're relating these stories to them,

they understand the power of moral courage. They also understand that true leadership is not exercised only to make sure to expand one's following or to win more votes.

*Break down walls between leaders and followers*

Integral leaders breakdown the walls between the so-called "leaders" and "followers". These leaders are becoming followers themselves, and followers, leaders. Eleanor Roosevelt, for example, was living very humbly after leaving the White House and made herself very available to the general public. Gandhi set up his headquarters in the hottest part of India, so he could literally "feel the heat"; like everyone else, as opposed to worrying about his ease of transportation to New Delhi.

*Respond to need rather than to utilitarianism*

Another difference we find is that integral leaders are not focusing so much on efficiency. Mother Teresa, for example, never promised that her organization could eliminate all poverty in the world. She did not convey a great vision of success, as currently leaders are told to do. Rather, she focused on helping one person at a time. While she has been criticized for not promoting policies that would reduce poverty in the world, she saw things differently: "I'm not interested in efficiency. I'm interested in dignity. I'm trying to respond, in a dignified fashion, to the present needs of the poor." And yet, and this is a paradox common in the West, by doing so, letting go of the ethics of utilitarianism, her organization is more efficient than many Western NGOs!

*Easily modify their life values and purpose*

To give one last example, integral leaders have the ability to modify their values. We have been told, by social scientists, that a person cannot change their life values and that social norms modify themselves over a very long time. However, Integral leaders can do so, and very fast! Gandhi is a classic example. He wanted to be an honest lawyer and for his family and he to enjoy the comfort of a nice house. Then, one evening, he was thrown off a train, because he was not white. That night, he decided that he would serve the Indian community in South Africa to help it regain its dignity. He changed his entire life purpose. As a leader, he also suggested that he did not care too much about policies. Rather, he stated, "My life is my message?" He considered life to be an experiment with truth, not a rigid statement of purpose. Today, in many organizations, we do the inverse. We ask our leaders to devise grand policies and to define the values that all must follow.

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What is the role of crucibles in the maturation of integral leaders? This research project, focusing on the entire life span of our subjects, allows us to state from empirical evidence that they are not born as integral leaders. Gandhi was certainly not born a leader; neither was Mother Teresa. They were both shy and not very gifted for leading others. All have however integrated different "crucibles"; the term used by Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas in *Geeks and Geezers*. The notion of a crucible is similar to "epiphany", in religious language, or to "life passage" in psychological terms. We try to understand, in our project, the kind and quantity of the crucibles integral leaders have experienced in their lives, as well as the effects these crucibles have had on the development of maturity.

Some of these crucibles were, indeed, powerful. Gandhi, for example, understood the wrongness of colonization during the Boer War in South Africa, witnessing the butchery of black tribes. Mother Teresa built her entire organization in response to the needs she observed directly in the streets, from the poorest of the poor. Nelson Mandela learned the richness of meditation during his twenty seven years in jail. These kinds of learning experiences are very different from the ones we experience today in universities or in other organizations. What most business schools offer for leadership training is case analysis, group assignments and, if one is lucky, professional internship. In the same vein, many organizations and consulting firms are still toying with 360-degree feedbacks, executive coaching and river rafting...

While we still need to harvest more data from our one hundred integral leaders, one commonality is already emerging, explaining in part why these leaders did not collapse in their crucibles but grew from them. The common element is a rich spiritual life. This spirituality, springing from all the traditions as well as from those not associated with formal religions, seems to provide these leaders with two key abilities: First, they are able to place these crucibles into a larger context, viewing them not as the proof of life's lack of meaning but as examples of things to be changed. Second, they are able to ground and develop themselves through their spiritual practices, meditation, prayer, yoga, contemplation or other means.

How do we train for integral leadership? Imagine if the fifty billion dollars that we are spending today in leadership training were not spent so much on behavioral modeling but on deep developmental processes? Eleanor Roosevelt understood this perfectly. While she helped to define and implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she was also very instrumental in establishing the American Peace Corps, created by J.F. Kennedy in 1961. She understood the need to create opportunities for future leaders to mature.

We believe that this research project will assist in both the definition of these better leadership-training practices and in their legitimization. The one hundred books we wish to publish will document, in very concrete ways, the crucibles that have influenced some of the most effective and ethical leaders in history. We will also complement this one hundred book series with teaching aids, computerized instruments, multimedia presentations and a dedicated web site. Our hope is that this multifaceted material will inspire the men and women working in private and public organizations, both individually and collectively, to engage themselves in integral development.

This study aims to establish just what makes integral leaders different from other leaders in the way they find meaning for themselves, in the ways they interact with others, the organizational tools they use and their relation to values. It will look at them in all four dimensions or quadrants, which are described by Ken Wilber in *A Theory of Everything*. As opposed to mimicking the actions of famous leaders — a common practice in leadership training programs — the great challenges of our world require that we become the best we can be, not a clone of someone else. Integral leaders can thus become witnesses and not models, helping themselves and others to act from the better angels of their own natures.

To know more about this project or to assist its completion:  
[www.leadographies.com](http://www.leadographies.com)



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