

# WISE: LEADERSHIP THAT LASTS

PART ONE

## WISDOM TO LEAD

### SAMPLE CHAPTER : WISDOM

Welcome to *Wise: Leading for Better Futures*, by Dr Mark Strom.  
We hope you enjoy this sample chapter from Part 2 – Conversation.  
[ *Wise: Leading for Better Futures* is a working title, the finished copy will be published in 2013. ]

*Wise: Leading for Better Futures*, is the revised edition of the original work, *Arts of the Wise Leader*, published in Auckland, 2007 by Sophos. Due to popular demand, Dr Mark Strom has created a revised edition, with new perspectives on wisdom and leadership applicable to both personal and professional contexts. This edition delves deeper into the philosophy of wisdom and what it means to truly lead wisely.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Strom studied theology, philosophy and history in Australia and the USA culminating in a PhD in the history of ideas through the University of Western Sydney.

Mark's research constituted a major study of the roots of modern leadership complexities in the traditions that shaped western thought and society. His doctoral mentor was Edwin Judge, the renowned Emeritus Professor of Ancient History at Macquarie University.

Mark has consulted to corporations and government bodies on systems thinking, cultural change, learning and leadership. He played a significant role in the renewal of some public schools.

Thousands of leaders have heard his keynote addresses or participated in his leadership seminars in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Belgium, Canada and the USA. Mark's three-day workshop, Arts of the Wise Leader, is a unique learning experience acclaimed by leaders in many sectors.

Mark is well-regarded as a speaker, teacher, adviser and historian of ideas grounded in his personal experience as CEO of Second Road, Australia and Laidlaw College, New Zealand where he led some of the most far-reaching changes in governance, vision, strategy, branding, operations and culture since the college began in 1922.

PART ONE

# WISDOM TO LEAD

CHAPTERS

01 WISDOM

02 LEADING

# 01 WISDOM

Wisdom reads life's patterns with discernment, integrity and care. So much depends on how attentive and present we are to life.

# WISDOM AND THE PATTERNS OF LIFE

Wisdom is close at hand.

Wisdom is reading well the patterns of life.

Wisdom is translating well the patterns of life.

Wisdom is staying open to the patterns of life.

Wisdom is living these patterns with integrity and care.

## Wisdom is the stuff of life

### Wisdom is as varied as us

Plato recalled Socrates saying, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Whether the old sage was right, we cannot say. But what we surely can say, is that the unreflective life seldom leads to wisdom.

No definition will do wisdom justice. It’s simply too vast, subtle, and profound. Yet wisdom is not utterly mysterious to us: we recognize it in the words, actions and characters of people. Perhaps, like love, we know wisdom more tacitly than overtly: we know more than we can say or define. We know love, and wisdom, as much by its absence as its presence, and we can discern the genuine article from pretence. And, like love, we long for the ways wisdom enriches and completes us.

Wisdom is as varied as us. It lives in all our glory and profundity, contradiction and absurdity. We glimpse it in fleeting insights as often as in settled understanding. We name an enduring relationship with our dearest ones as a life of love. Yet not every moment of even the most intimate relationship bears all the marks of love. We cannot live with such intensity. Likewise no one, not even the wisest, thinks and acts with unbroken wisdom. Just as we lapse into forgetfulness and thoughtlessness toward the ones we love most, so even the wisest lapse into folly.

Wisdom is disarmingly human: always within reach, yet somehow illusive. So how do we recognize it?

Wisdom is as old as humanity: the accumulated insights of cultures and traditions gained over vast generations. At our best, we live, we notice, we learn, we remember, and we bequeath a better legacy.

## Wisdom is close at hand

### We recognize wisdom in people

We recognize wisdom in those we admire as honourable, perceptive or grounded. We bring to mind those whom we believe have made the world a better place. We recall those who have touched our own lives for good.

Imagine if we could invite them all to dinner, the famous along with our own dear friends. What a conversation that would be! One thing's for sure: they would disagree as often as they agreed. Few would have made the same decision in the same way in the same context. At some point, the simplest might stump the smartest. The obscure might confound the famous. The uneducated might instruct the learned. No one has a mortgage on wisdom. Wisdom crosses culture and geography, education and accomplishment, personality and experience.

The most precious resource we have for coping with life in an unstable, discontinuous and revolutionary world is not information, but each other. Wisdom is not to be found in a database; it grows out of the experience of living the life of the human herd and absorbing the lessons which that experience inevitably teaches us about who we are. [1]

HUGH MCKAY

### We have all seen wisdom

In seminars and workshops over the years I have asked people to recall those whom they considered wise. People for whom we are grateful, whose words and lives have influenced ours for good. Many find it odd to speak of others as wise but, as we recall the stories, the word begins to feel apt.

It feels natural to compile a list of attributes. But no list will do justice to experience: stories are the key. The subtlety and depth of their friends lies in their shared stories. This is where the textures and hues of wisdom become apparent.

Some speak of friends who gave strong and emphatic direction and counsel. Others of friends who would not give advice, but made room for them to make sense of things for themselves, and to learn from their own mistakes. Wisdom came in gentle tones—or like a whack on the side of the head! We begin to sense that wisdom is contextual: one action in one place may be wise; in another it may be foolish.

I commend to you the same exercise: to consider those who have been wise in your own life.

### A MEMORY OF WISDOM:

We might not have called them wise, but we may well have known people who were. A memory may reveal their wisdom. Think of someone you deeply appreciate for the way her or his life touched yours. Perhaps you can recall a time you spent together that helped you find your way. Maybe it was a business decision. Or, better, something really important like a tough time as a friend or a parent. How did your wise friend talk to you, regard you and treat you? And what can you recall about the ways she looked at life and herself? Here in these memories are our snapshots of wisdom. We have only to remember, enjoy, and learn.

# THE PRIORITY OF WISDOM

The ways they said it differ as much as their times and cultures, but from ancient times to the present, the sages agree: wisdom is paramount.

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get understanding. [2]

#### SOLOMON

He who knows others is clever,  
He who knows himself has discernment.  
He who masters others has force,  
He who masters himself is strong.  
He who knows contentment is rich,  
He who perseveres is a man of purpose. [3]

#### LAO-TSE

Be really whole,  
And all things will come to you. [4]

#### LAO-TSE

At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I had no doubts; at fifty I was conscious of the decrees of heaven; at sixty I was already obedient to these decrees; at seventy I just followed my heart's desire, without overstepping the boundaries (of what is right). [5]

#### CONFUCIUS

Imperturbable wisdom, being most honorable, is worth everything. [6]

#### DEMOCRITUS

A man, though wise, should never be ashamed of learning more, and must unbend his mind. [7]

#### SOPHOCLES

Everybody ought by all means to try and make himself as wise as he can. [8]

#### PLATO

With regard to excellence, it is not enough to know it, but we must try to have it and use it. [9]

#### ARISTOTLE

Let us acknowledge then that each one has just so much of happiness as he has of virtue and wisdom, and of virtuous and wise action. [10]

#### ARISTOTLE

There is no purifier in this world like wisdom. [11]

#### BHAGAVAD-GITA

No man is ever wise enough by himself. [12]

#### PLAUTUS

If wisdom be attainable, let us not only win but enjoy it. [13]

#### CICERO

To love, then, is only in the power of the wise. [14]

#### EPICETUS

For what is more agreeable than wisdom itself, when you think of the security and the happy course of all things which depend on the faculty of understanding and knowledge. [15]

#### MARCUS AURELIUS

Things have their seasons, and even certain kinds of eminence go in and out of style. But wisdom has an advantage: She is eternal. [16]

#### BALTHASAR GRACIAN

Wisdom is to the soul what health is to the body. [17]

#### LA ROUCHEFOUCAULD

It is also called the true wisdom, namely, the practical, because it makes the ultimate end of the existence of man on earth its own end. Its possession alone make men free, healthy, rich, a king, etc., nor can either chance or fate deprive him of this, since he possesses himself, and the virtuous cannot lose his virtue. [18]

#### IMMANUEL KANT

Character is power. [19]

#### BOOKER WASHINGTON

There is more to life than increasing its speed. [20]

#### GANDHI

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? [21]

#### T.S. ELIOT

There is no logical path to these (physical) laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can reach them. [22]

#### ALBERT EINSTEIN

Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant may prove to be our executioner. [23]

#### GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY

The exclusion of wisdom from economics, science, and technology was something which we could perhaps get away with for a little while, as long as we were relatively unsuccessful; but now that we have become very successful, the problem of spiritual and moral truth moves into the central position. [24]

#### E. F. SCHUMACHER

By learning comes understanding. Through understanding comes knowledge and wisdom. Through knowledge and wisdom comes life and well-being. [25]

#### MAORI PROVERB

**A useful distinction:**

**Wisdom is observation and insight, not morality or formula.**

Morality and formula view life as binary—as choices of right/wrong, best/worst.

Wisdom views life as a whole—a vast complex tapestry.

For millennia people have looked to their wisdom traditions for guidance. These profound observations of life have instructed and warned generations. But the traditions cannot tell us what to do. The decisions remain ours and through them we grow wise...or foolish.

The wisdom traditions reflect life as it was experienced, not as a moralist might claim it should be. The sayings are imbalanced, incomplete and liable to misunderstanding. They leave us the task of discernment. Only we can say how, or even whether, their observations speak to our particular situation. Wisdom offers no prescriptions for life for wisdom is contextual.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition we find two curious contradictory pieces of advice:

**Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.**

**Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes. [26]**

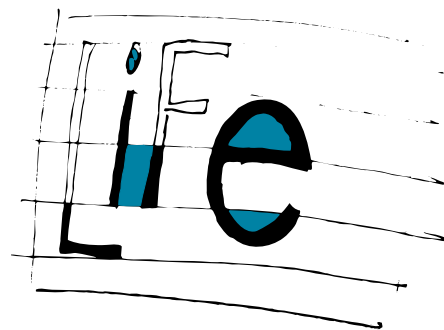
These two sayings, arranged one after the other, advise opposite courses of action when confronted by someone spouting nonsense. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly.” How many would-be critics end up looking as foolish as the people they judge! Yet sometimes

foolishness should be exposed. “Answer the fool according to his folly.” There is a time to play the court jester, lampooning the king with his own foolishness.

So how do we know which strategy to choose? By a wise response to our particular context. So how do we respond wisely? By becoming wise! The frustrating circularity of wisdom urges us again and again to watch, to listen, to read, to discern, and to store up insights from which we may draw.

**Wisdom views life as a whole—a vast complex tapestry.**

So, we know that we recognize wisdom even when we can't define it. We know it is most apparent in people. We know it depends on context. We know that wisdom is far richer and more subtle than any rules, morals, systems, or processes.



## Wisdom is reading well the patterns of life

### A working definition of wisdom

Wisdom is as broad as the ability to live well grounded in good understanding. We grow in knowledge of ourselves and of the world around us and we learn to make good choices and to live well with others.

What we have seen so far encourages me to offer something more nuanced. Here then is my working picture of wisdom. It has two parts:

**First, I view wisdom as ways of being and knowing by which we indwell and read the patterns of life insightfully—the patterns of our own lives, of each other, and of the wider world. Second, wisdom is then the ways we bring this indwelling and insight to specific contexts with discernment and nuance, integrity and care.**

We will unpack this reluctant definition in four themes. As I have searched the wisdom traditions, and partnered those who lead today, four things have stood out to me as features of the wise:

1. They read well the patterns of life.
2. They apply these patterns to the choices at hand.
3. They stay open to new possibility and understanding.
4. They act with integrity and care.

We would be forever lost in the impossibly complex tapestry of life were it not for our ability to see similarities between situations despite myriad differences. We 'read' patterns in the natural world, and in the stories, characters and events that fill our lives. These patterns are our pathways to understanding.

So where do we find these patterns?

**At its heart, wisdom is the ability to live well grounded in good understanding. We grow in knowledge of ourselves and of the world around us, and we learn to make good choices and to live well with others.**

## Watch life and learn

### The patterns of the natural order teach us about life

In many of the ancient traditions, nature is infused with wisdom and the wise pay heed to the world about them:

There is no river that permits itself to be concealed; that is, it breaks the dam by which it was hidden. So also the soul goes to the place which it knows, and deviates not from its way of yesterday. [27]

#### THE INSTRUCTION OF KING MERI-KA-RE

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. [28]

#### SOLOMON

Earth teach me quiet—as the grasses are still with new light.

Earth teach me suffering—as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth teach me humility—as blossoms are humble with beginning.

Earth teach me caring—as mothers nurture their young.

Earth teach me courage—as the tree that stands alone.

Earth teach me limitation—as the ant that crawls on the ground.

Earth teach me freedom—as the eagle that soars in the sky.

Earth teach me acceptance—as the

leaves that die each fall.

Earth teach me renewal—as the seed that rises in the spring.

Earth teach me to forget myself—as melted snow forgets its life.

Earth teach me to remember kindness—as dry fields weep with rain. [29]

#### NATIVE AMERICAN UTE PRAYER, PROVENANCE UNKNOWN

### The patterns of people teach us about life

The wisdom traditions urge us to read people well if we wish to live well. Pay attention how people live and deal with one another, they seem to say. Imitate the ways of the wise. Shun the way of fools:

Do not set out to stand around in the assembly.

Do not loiter where there is a dispute, for in the dispute they will have you as an observer.

Then you will be made a witness for them, and they will involve you in a lawsuit to affirm something that does not concern you.

In case of a dispute, get away from it, disregard it.

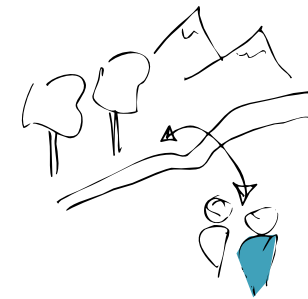
A dispute is a covered pit, a ... wall which can cover over its foes; it brings to mind what one has forgotten and makes an accusation against a man. [30]

#### THE INSTRUCTIONS OF SHURUPPAK

Is a man not superior, who without anticipating attempts at deception or presuming acts of bad faith, is, nonetheless, the first to be aware of such behaviour? [31]

He stands to benefit who makes friends with three kinds of people. Equally he stands to lose who makes friends with three other kinds of people. To make friends with the straight, the trustworthy in word and the well-informed is to benefit. To make friends with the ingratiating in action, the pleasant in appearance and the plausible in speech is to lose. [32]

#### CONFUCIUS



LEARNING WISDOM FROM THE HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN WORLD.

### OBSERVATIONS OF WISDOM

For just two weeks, you might like to keep a journal of what you notice people doing. Not everything of course, but those things that seem to suggest what it means to be wise—or foolish. For example, the kinds of things make, shape and break relationships. Or how people show interest or make it. Listen to the ways people speak. What impact do words have? And how do people find clarity when they are confused? Stand back a little from your observations and ask what you are seeing. You might like to try writing some sentences beginning, “Being wise is like...”



## Words change things

Have you ever said something and immediately wished you could take it back? Those with children know the experience only too well! A word spoken is never retrieved. An apt or kind word can bring life. An ill-considered or harsh word can bring ruin.

Words change things. Quite possibly, there is nothing as powerful. Unsurprisingly the wisdom traditions placed disproportionate emphasis upon “the tongue”:

For a word is a bird: once released, no man can recapture it. [33]

### THE WORDS OF AHIQAR

Do not associate thyself to the heated man, nor visit him for conversation. Preserve thy tongue from answering thy superior, and guard thyself against reviling him. Do not make too free with thy answer.

Thou shouldst discuss an answer only with a man of thy own size, and guard thyself against plunging headlong into it. Swifter is speech when the heart is hurt than wind of the head-waters ... Do not leap to hold such a one, lest a terror carry thee off. [34]

### THE INSTRUCTION OF AMEN-EM-OPET

My son, chatter not overmuch so that thou speak out every word that comes to thy mind; for men’s eyes and ears are

everywhere trained upon thy mouth. Beware lest it be thy undoing. [35]

### THE WORDS OF AHIQAR

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. [36]

### SOLOMON

Many men perform the foulest deeds and practice the fairest words. [37]

Fine words do not hide foul actions nor is a good action spoiled by slanderous words. [38]

### DEMOCRITUS

To fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefiting is to let a man go to waste. To speak to a man who is incapable of benefiting is to let one’s words go to waste. A wise man lets neither men nor words go to waste. [39]

### CONFUCIUS

“A wise man lets neither men nor words go to waste.” Wise leaders value both people and words. Words of value build people of value. Foolish words bring ruin. Words are the primary tool of every leader. So much depends on the words we use, the ways we speak, and the language and conversations we foster among others. We will return to this theme frequently.

### SPEECH TIPS FROM THE ANCIENTS

Upright words nourish many.

A gentle answer turns away anger.

How good is a timely word.

Pleasant words promote instruction

Let another praise you, not you.

Don’t say every word you think of!

To answer before listening: that is folly.

A fool is thought wise if he keeps silent.

When words are many, evil is present.

Whoever spreads slander is a fool.

A flattering mouth works ruin.

A fool shows his annoyance at once.

Arrogant lips are unsuited to a fool.

Fine words do not hide foul actions.

A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour and a deadly snare.

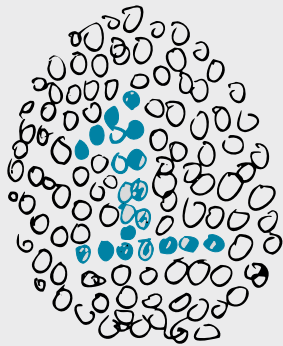
[40]



# ONE AND MANY

## Where philosophy began

Ever wondered how philosophy began? To (greatly) oversimplify a (very) long story, it began with a question. Ok, there was more than one question. But this was probably the biggest: how come there is unity—coherence, order, meaning—within the bewildering diversity of life? [In different ways, this question shaped both western and eastern traditions of philosophy.] What we call unity and diversity, the ancients called ‘the One and the Many’. The ‘One’ as in the whole; the ‘Many’ as in the parts.



Now ideas arise in social contexts, and so did the question of One and Many. Life in each city-state (polis) of what we now call ancient Greece was largely self-contained. But the seventh century BC brought unprecedented access to peoples and conventions beyond their own borders.

This brought unsettling questions. In what ways were other peoples and conventions the same (One) and in what ways different (Many)? It seemed, for example, that every city had an idea of justice; but not always the same idea. Was justice merely a convention, or was there something universal to the idea? So how should a city frame its laws?

## How Plato split the world

Surely, the ancients reasoned, even though there’s so much change (Many), some things must stay the same (One). Or does life swing between being ordered and coherent (One) and fragmented and chaotic (Many)? We aren’t the first ones to feel like life goes back and forth between the two:

*At one time they grew to be one alone from being many, and at another they grew apart again to be many from being one. [41]*

### EMPEDOCLES

The philosophers pondered whether something, somehow, might unify all the diversity they experienced. But what? This was the appeal of the four elements—earth, fire, air, and water. Perhaps individually, or as a whole, the elements were what held everything together.

Then again, some argued, maybe life only looks ordered (One). Perhaps its actually

really fragmented and chaotic and only change is constant (Many). Heraclitus thought so. Or maybe it’s the exact opposite: that change is an illusion. That was Parmenides’ choice. The pre-Socratic philosophers explored every possibility.

The solution put forward by Plato hugely influenced Western thought. Returning to our topic of justice, Plato argued that there is one true, eternal Form (Pure Idea) of Justice, and that every instance of justice we see is a poor copy of that Form. Likewise there is a Form of Goodness, and of Beauty, and of everything else that unifies our diverse experiences and ideas. Every single thing we see is a corrupted copy (Many) of a perfect original idea (One):

*We distinguish between the many particular things which we call beautiful or good, and absolute beauty and goodness. [42]*

### PLATO

Plato’s answer split the world in two. On the one hand, the Forms—pure ideas, eternal and unchanging. On the other hand, Matter—the changeable world of everyday experiences and things. Ok, time for a ditty: In Plato’s scheme, Matter doesn’t matter; only what isn’t Matter, matters. [Did you get that?!]

This strange answer mirrored society. Plato lived a privileged life in a city

stratified from those that mattered (high rank) to those that didn’t (low rank). I think we can link his theory with his life: Plato philosophized a picture of ultimate reality that mirrored his own privileged life as an educated man of rank.

This theory of a split world—philosophers call it dualism—yielded an ‘upstairs downstairs’ world view. Plato saw people as a microcosm of this split universe: each of us, he said, has a divine element (mind, soul) that grasps the Forms; but we are trapped within corrupt physical Matter (body). This idea reinforced the prejudice of those of high rank against those who “worked with their own hands”, a put-down that recurs in over a thousand years of classical literature.

Plato’s vision of reality shaped and was shaped by his belief that we should place greater trust in reason than in our senses (mere “opinion and irrational sensation”). Our senses are too caught up in Matter. Only reason, Plato believed, could let us distance ourselves enough from Matter to gain some knowledge of the Forms. More on reason later.

# HOW TO PICK A SPLIT WORLD



## Plato's legacy lives on

Look for false distinctions about what's most 'real,' and what ways of knowing that are more 'true'.

You may hear forced distinctions like...

- Reason vs emotion
- Theory vs practice
- Intellectual vs practical
- Analysis vs imagination
- Centralized vs decentralized
- Best practice vs our best stories
- Knowledge work vs craft work

**For Plato, reason was like a ladder: we must lift our thinking from what we see to the 'real truth' of pure ideas.**

**For managers, how people actually work and relate can seem 'lower' or less rational than statistics, analysis, and models of best practice.**

## Plato's legacy shapes management

Look for ways analysis, models and plans are given more weight than what people actually say and do in context.

You may hear ideas like...

- Importing "world's best practice" without asking if it fits the context
- Treating all 'problems' as solvable by right model + data + analysis
- Using restructures to (supposedly) change how people think, work and 'engage' (ie. 'cultural change')

Ignoring the pride in craft of workers, calling them unengaged because our vision/mission/values hold no interest for them.

## Wisdom is translating well the patterns of life

### Wisdom is not balance but sitting well with ambiguity

The key to One and Many might seem to be balance. Certainly the ancient Greeks believed that: perfection was balance, moderation, lack of excess, harmony, the middle way. But balance (the 'mean') is an abstract ideal that never occurs:

Half a world away from Athens, Mencius saw the problem well: To lay hold of the mean without taking into account the occasion, is like grasping one thing only. [43]

Focusing on finding the middle point or balance may lead to an understanding or strategy that is not grounded in the realities of the actual context of action. It isn't hard to see this mistake today.

Balance is rarely the answer. What we need is the depth to work with both One and Many without becoming either cynical or idealistic about our solutions.

Wisdom is marked by an ability to sit with ambiguity: an ability to see and consider from multiple perspectives. We don't need, and we can never have, a complete view of anything. Rather, we move between the one and the many—the pattern or principle and the specifics of a given context—searching for insight. This is the heart of thinking contextually and systemically.

Only seeing patterns makes us armchair philosophers. Applying patterns to the contexts around (and within) us moves us toward engagement and action. Wisdom requires the hard work of discerning context. From the storehouse of patterns we have observed, and the instinct to read the present, we choose a particular line of speech or action to meet the challenges of the particular context.

Balance is rarely the answer. What we need is the depth to work with both One and Many without becoming either cynical or idealistic about our solutions.

## Abstraction, or the curse of the school project

### The gift and curse of abstraction

The Greek philosophers tended to give greater weight to ideas than to their expression. A method evolved that we might call abstraction.

The key idea was to distinguish the truth or essence of something from the details—like finding the kernel and discarding the husk, or peeling an onion. In medicine, science, engineering and more, the method of abstraction has enabled amazing discovery and invention.

But abstraction can also reduce what is living and changing to fixed and clumsy categories. The problem arises when theory loses touch with the world:

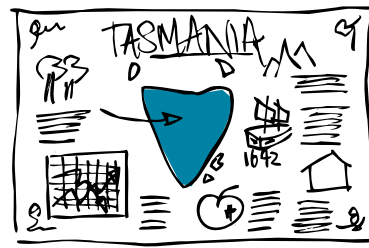
**Good theory ... is both an abstraction from, and an enrichment of, our concrete experience ... But if theory attempts to displace skill and understanding in concrete situations, it becomes first a nuisance and later a hindrance to both thought and action.** [44]

DAVID TRACY

### Fighting an educational legacy

Do you remember the 'projects' we did in primary or elementary school? A collage of pictures and words arranged and decorated on a sheet of cardboard. Many of us sat around the kitchen table 'helping' Mum or Dad complete the project the night before it was due.

The topic was always broad like 'Frogs' or 'Parliament' or 'Tasmania'. Occasionally we (or our parents!) got interested and learned something. But that was optional.



The real task was to fill up the sheet of cardboard with anything and everything we thought belonged under the topic:

Moving to high school, we progressed from the project to the essay. Quotes on scraps of paper littered the bedroom floor. Now we had to deal with plagiarism. We decided which quotes to footnote, discard, or 'put in our own words'.

**The game was still the same: fill the essay or presentation with whatever we could find.**

## WHY ARE MEETINGS + PRESENTATIONS SO BORING?

Roll forward. We attend a presentation. The slides are full of words but we can't find the point. The meeting has an agenda but no real conversation. It is like a grown-up school project. The presenter has relayed everything he thinks he should say, but there's no argument or key question.

This awkward, rigid pattern shapes a great deal of organizational life.

Teachers work with assessment regimes designed by people who don't teach. Quality systems bypass the craftsmanship of workers. Immigrants face a maze of queues, indecipherable forms and instructions. Confronted with the paper trail of taxation compliance, small business owners shut their doors. The world of wisdom would call all of this foolishness.

Imagine the alternative: Great ideas grounded in experience. Policies that match the context. Systems that enable people. Processes designed to give people appropriate discretion and to make room for their brilliance.



# TRANSLATING TAKES PERSPECTIVE

## It's all whole process

First we read the patterns: we attend to them and interpret them. Next we take the meaning we have derived and translate it to another context. We creatively bring these insights to the ways we live in our own contexts: we improvise.

None of this happens like one, two, three. It is iterative not sequential. [Reading, attending, interpreting, translating, improvising—all happen together.](#)

## We build systems in our minds

[Life is mind-bogglingly inter-connected. So is our knowledge of it.](#)

One of our most successful tricks is to bundle phenomena together and call it a system.

It's a great tool but limited. Each system is too big. We can't grasp it all, nor even our own involvement in it. And once we 'see' it, no matter how roughly, then every 'fact' seems to confirm the 'system'.

All this sounds purely conceptual; a mental game. [But translating is always social.](#) Sooner or later we recognise we are part of communities grappling to read and translate the same things.

[So all our knowledge is analogical—we know one thing by reference to something else.](#)

We are always making and testing analogies. We are always interpreting.

We're thrown into this. We are part of what we want to read and translate. Our language reveals our assumptions and interpretations.

## We learn to multiply perspectives

We can't be neutral about what we are reading and trying to translate. Nor can we hold the enormity of data in our heads. [Something—a metaphor, an analogy, theme—becomes like a window or a pair of glasses through which we see everything.](#)

We see perspectively. Something enables us to find a sense of One in the midst of Many. Once we realise this, and become skilled at it, a new possibility for interpretation and translation becomes possible. We can deliberately multiply perspectives as ways of seeing more and maybe even richer pictures of reality.

## Translating from then to now

For almost thirty years I have maintained a dialogue between some seismic shifts in the history of ideas and the challenges of today's leaders.

The classical world of Greece and Rome was overwhelmingly hierarchical in social order. And many philosophers enjoyed the privileges of rank.

Interestingly, the philosophers usually explained life in ways that upheld the social order, even suggesting that only their peers were capable of philosophy. It was a closed system: social order + education for the elite + abstract ways of thinking: everyday people and their lives had little to offer.

Into this mix came Saul of Tarsus, later Paul. Recent neo-Marxist philosophers rank him with Plato and Aristotle. Paul located truth in story not abstract ideas. Experience was the test of an idea. He founded groups others maligned for their egalitarianism, hospitality, and open intellectual life. This social and intellectual revolution would touch every aspect of western thought.

What has this to do with today's leaders? Much in every way. We live out of this inherited awkward hybrid. [The possibilities of translation lie in digging deeply into both contexts.](#)

What was really going on for and through Paul? What were the social, political, and intellectual contexts? Where was he conventional, confrontational, and innovative? How did huge changes come from modest beginnings?

What is really happening for us today? What are our contexts? Where does convention work against innovation and change? Where is the classical legacy: leaders must be strong, decisive, and aloof? Where is Paul's legacy: leaders must be fair, approachable, kind, even humble?

Some want to base leadership on the classical virtues. This has merit, but we can't ignore the links to elitism. I have pointed to the ways Paul brought deep change. But there is no simple translation. Our worlds are mixed and we can't turn back the clock.

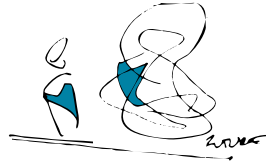
[Nonetheless I have seen this enquiry prompt Executives to new realisations of what is happening and what might be possible.](#) Linking their stories to ancient ones, they find space to interpret, translate, and improvise.

## TIP

### Searching for perspectives

1. Immerse yourself in what you're reading. Admit the limits of your understanding.
2. Find the passion
3. Move between looking at the whole (One) and the parts (Many)—you can start either place
4. Listen for core stories
5. Listen for how your language or others opens up or shuts down how you read and interpret.
6. Try a metaphor as a perspective. Make links. Sit with it. But don't get too attached too early. Expect them to change.
7. Ask if you have succumbed to the 'school project'—just saying everything. Put people back in the centre.
8. And talk, write, talk, write. Try telling a new story. Watch if people 'cross the bridge' with you.

# THREE TESTS FOR STRATEGY



Maybe talking about patterns, one and many, dualism, and abstraction seems too philosophical and impractical—especially to business. Here are three quick tests to see if these ideas really do have an impact on us today. For any strategy look for one or more of these fallacies:

## 1. The fallacy of balance

Sound familiar?

“Sales will be up by 20% next year.”  
“I think we can only expect 10%.”  
“Ok, we’ll plan for 15%.”

I have heard this kind of bargaining at the centre of many strategy and planning sessions. It seeks balance, or consensus.

There are always lots of numbers to back it up.

But we can be pretty sure the future isn’t going to lie in the middle of any set of numbers.

**It looks rational.**  
**But it’s not.**

## 2. The fallacies of order and certainty

Sound familiar?

“Did we include all the data from all the sites?”  
“No, some just didn’t match the model.”  
“So how do we know the model is right?”  
“Well it fits the data we used.”

I have seen this kind of selective data used to make the most ambiguous context look ordered, bounded, and able to be analysed.

The spreadsheets seem irrefutable. Besides things look messy without them.

**It looks analytical.**  
**But it’s not.**

## 3. The fallacy of presentation

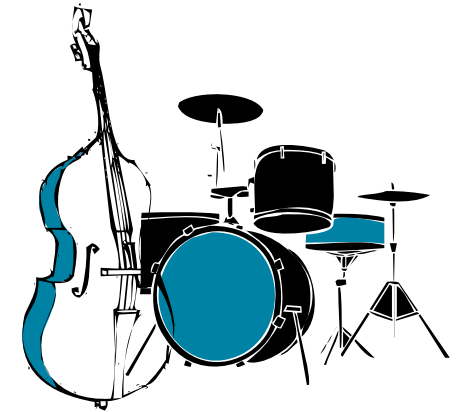
Sound familiar?

“We’ve started a project?”  
“How far are you?”  
“Just beginning. What should we do?”  
“A PPT presentation.”  
“What should I include?”  
“Everything. Best Practice. Articles. Lots of stats. Just cut-n-paste your last one.”

I have seen this kind of presentation convince a group they are ready for a solution when they haven’t even started to explore the issue.

**It looks professional.**  
**But it’s not.**

# TRANSLATING IS LIKE IMPROVISING



**Improvising is about the players as much as the music**

Once we sense the general relevance of certain patterns in life and human experience, we must discern their relevance to a particular context. Having read the foolishness or possibility in a situation, is this a time to speak up, or to hold back? We do not follow scripts—or scores.

Translating is more like a band improvising jazz than an orchestra playing a score. To the non-musical, jazz can look chaotic. But it isn’t. There is a key, time signature(s), and an unmistakable ‘groove’—all (usually) without a score. There are melodies or, if not, at least chord progressions. Nor is it only about brilliant solo virtuosity.

Within and around the parameters of key and time (etc), and especially what the other players bring, each musician

improvises her own complex of near-melodies around an underlying melody we cannot hear but continue to assume.

Layers of texture and colour are laid down. Each may be embellished,

**Translating is far more like a band improvising jazz than an orchestra playing a score. Nor is it only about brilliant solo virtuosity.**

augmented, and reworked by other players: sometimes in the call-and-response of blues, or by opening up new vistas for those who follow to explore. The music depends as much on relational and as on musical skill.

So it is with translating and applying the patterns of life. Insight does not precede engagement. We sense the ‘groove’, find freedom in the mutual submission of the ‘band’, and dare to play without certainty. It is only in playing that we find the music.

## Q. WISDOM IS SO BIG. WHERE DO YOU START?

- A. Personally I find it helpful to start with attentiveness and presence. Wisdom asks me to pay attention to life; to notice and wonder and consider. Life is so big. Sometimes I can't start 'out there'; I have to start 'in here'. It isn't natural for me to pay attention or to be present to what is happening around and within me. I'm too busy. Too distracted. But sometimes, without warning, a door opens to wonder. I start to pay attention. Stillness becomes possible. I may find myself uncommonly present to others and to the world, its beauty and its travail. This is where my learning starts.

## Wisdom is staying open to the patterns of life

### It is one thing to know, and another to notice

We read and we translate that which comes to our attention. Or so it seems. Yet most knowing is tacit: we don't know what we know (more in chapter four). Indeed, we read far more than we realize: in a sense, we are always reading. Wisdom builds upon this knowledge that we absorb.

To learn, we must pay attention to life within us and beyond us. We must learn to discern the presence and significance of patterns, picking up nuance and subtlety, congruence and anomaly.

Attentiveness ushers wisdom and it is urged in many traditions. In the opening instructions of *Mishlê Shlomoh*, the Proverbs of Solomon, we read: "turn your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding" [46] and "my son, pay attention to my wisdom; turn your ear to my words of insight". [47]

To be attentive is more than thinking. It is to draw near to engage, not to stand apart. It requires one to be present to what is emerging around us and within us. We enter into that which we seek to know; whether ideas, events, other people, or even our own hearts.

If we liken reading life's patterns to making maps of reality, then our goal is not to be great map-makers, but to travel. There is an attentiveness to every facet: reading the terrain, drawing a map, locating ourselves, plotting a path, and journeying itself.

You can become blind by seeing each day as a similar one. Each day is a different one, each day brings a miracle of its own. It's just a matter of paying attention to this miracle. [45]

PAULO COELHO



## Everyone is attentive but not in the same way

Tell me to what you pay attention and I will tell you who you are. [48]

JOSE ORTEGA Y GASSET

“Pay attention!”

Mrs. Monaghan was my third grade teacher. For a sweet, kind teacher she had a wicked habit. She would sneak up behind anyone daydreaming and whack the desk with a three-foot ruler! She got me several times even though, due to illness, I wasn't at school all that often. Seems attentiveness wasn't a strong point for me.

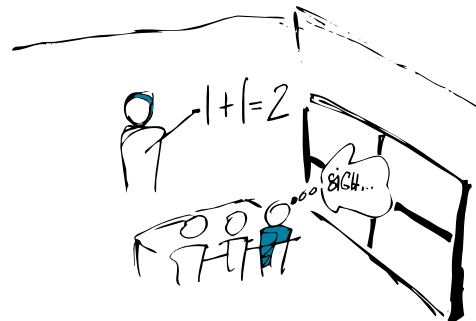
Now I may just be making excuses but I'd like to think my inattentiveness in class masked an attentiveness of another kind. School certainly did not hold my attention; but life did.

I've known many children who were fascinated by life but not by school; my own included. I can't help feeling that the attentiveness valued at school is too often contrived. The goal seems to be compliance, not curiosity; an attentiveness without presence.

At its worst, a child may learn to pay enough attention to repeat what is given to her, without actually engaging with what is being offered.

This is less than the attentiveness that reads patterns discerningly. It is less than what prepares us to act on that insight with integrity and care. And it is far less than what we all have. That 'distracted' schoolgirl or boy may be enthralled with another 'curriculum'. Thankfully there are many, many teachers who know and nurture this deeper fascination.

Just why some things more than others come to hold our attention is perhaps unfathomable. So what can we say about attentiveness? One thing's for sure, it's as varied as we are.



# DEEP LEARNING

## ATTENTIVE TO COMPOSERS

The autobiography of Australian pianist Anna Goldsworthy, *Piano Lessons*, takes us inside the beautiful tale of her relationship with the Russian piano teacher Eleonora Sivan. [49]

While guiding her as an aspiring performer, Sivan seemed to be urging Anna to a deeper learning: “how do we know, how do we grow wise?” Her answer was to lead Anna inside the lives of each composer she sought to play.

Sivan's instructions to her young prodigy offer a rich cameo of attentiveness and presence:

“This is first arts of any music: learn to listen to silence, atmospheric silence. Only then can we understand future and perspective’...She repeated (this) for years before I started to understand it. It is only by hearing a sound first in your imagination that you relax. And it is only by relaxing that you properly hear that sound, be mindful of that sound, understand it as a sound in time, in context of a past and future... ‘We play with our ears,’ she reminded me. ‘Seeing ears, hearing eyes. Clever heart, warm brain...Open-minded is the first sign of talent, and then all life like magic door opening.’ [50]

## ATTENTIVE TO CITIES

Stephen Wiltshire is a young man with significant disabilities. He also has an extraordinary gift for drawing and painting detailed cityscapes from memory and imagination.

As a child Stephen was mute and did not relate to other human beings. Aged three, he was diagnosed as autistic, and later as having savant syndrome.

Stephen had no language and lived entirely in his own world. At the age of five it was noticed that the only pastime he enjoyed was drawing. It soon became apparent he communicated with the world through the language of drawing; first animals, then buses, and finally buildings. These drawings show a masterful perspective, a whimsical line, and reveal a natural innate artistry.

In May 2005, after a short helicopter ride over Tokyo, he drew a stunningly detailed panoramic view of the city on a 10-meter-long canvas, from memory. He has since drawn Rome, Hong Kong, Frankfurt, Madrid, Dubai, Jerusalem and London on giant canvasses. [51]

Accounts of wisdom, attentiveness, and knowing rarely consider the unique ways of those we might otherwise consider not ‘present’. [52]



# EVERYDAY THOUGHTS ON ATTENTIVENESS

I posted a question on Facebook: “What comes to mind when you think of being attentive and present to life, to moments, to people, and to yourself?” Here, with their permission, are my paraphrases of my friends’ responses:

As noble as it sounds, we can’t suspend our assumptions, hopes, or fears to attend to the other. But when curiosity meets empathy, we learn to attend to life and to each other through what makes us who we are. (Richard)

Attentiveness is like a vulnerable embrace. This can reach profound depths when confronted with disability. There is no room for easy platitudes. (Immanuel)

When we are thankful, a stillness settles in us. We recognise what is; we cease striving for something else to be so. In this ‘presentness’ we may read life’s patterns. (Tara)

Attentiveness, encounter, vulnerability, gratitude, and curiosity are most present in the moment of giving and gift. There

is a bondedness—reciprocity, obedience, humility—about life. We must learn to be attentive not only to possibility but to what is called forth from us. (John)

It takes courage to lay down false projections of self created in fear of judgement and hope of acceptance. Deeper and truer friendship is possible as the fear of judgment leaves. There we can be present with one another. (Ash)

Wisdom does not dissect life into parts. Perhaps wisdom is the way of the undivided life. (Meredith)

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF BEING ATTENTIVE + PRESENT?



Attention looks for wholes, for significance, for meaning. It is the contradictory and incoherent aspects of experience that help hone this skill.

In contrast, modern rational thought attempts to remove the uncertain, blunting our ability to be attentive. (Bryce)

Attentiveness and presence takes the courage to look seriously into the paradox of our own glory and brokenness. (Jayme)

Think of the fracturing forces that have shaped our lives. Perhaps we are only able to face different things at different stages of life. (David)

Attentiveness and presence is not dissociation: it is the courage and vulnerability of being still and listening deeply. (Emma)

We are bombarded with distractions; it’s so hard to pause to see or hear what needs to be heard and seen. (Jacqui)

Image making and slogans shape society and push attentiveness and presence to the margins. (John)

Speech is a kind of risk: to be attentive and present is to trust another and to guard the trust given in return. (Scott)

Paradoxically, attentiveness helps us see life’s ‘non-patterns’—the discontinuities. Here too lie the things of wisdom and of what it is to be truly human. (Kenneth)

There are liturgies of attentiveness and presence. Reflect on your day: what brought consolation and desolation? (Belinda)

Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant? [53]

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

## THE WISDOM OF JANITORS

A favourite TED talk is by Barry Schwartz, a professor of social theory and social action. [54] In his address, Schwartz asked what it means to be wise and why we don’t value it. And he focused on janitors.

A janitor’s job description seems unexceptional until, as Schwartz notes, we realise it includes nothing that involves people. The job might “as well be done in a mortuary as in a hospital”. But as Schwartz shows in three short stories, the work of the best janitors is relational to the core.

Good janitors don’t just notice dirty spots on floors and full trash cans. They notice people: an exhausted family in a waiting area; or a grieving father keeping a bedside vigil. They read what is happening for these people and they adjust their work and the environment accordingly. They exercise attentiveness and judgement in aid of family, well-being, grieving and even healing.

Good janitors exercise intuition, imagination, attentiveness, presence, integrity and care just as much as skill with a mop.

Footnote: Think for a moment of how a managerial mindset might judge the quality of a janitor’s work: measures for ‘efficiency’ without a single thought for attentiveness and judgement.

### REFLECT

When have you felt unusually attentive? Perhaps it was a moment of heightened wonder, curiosity, love, responsibility, fear, or something altogether different. What do these moments suggest about your ability to be attentive and present? On the other hand, what if anything blocks this for you?

## Sometimes to be 'useless' is to be present

Some forms of attentiveness and presence are about being highly attuned to the needs and responsibilities of a given moment: in short, about being useful. Yet they can also surface in the very opposite and disturbing experience of sensing we have nothing to bring. In the thralls of a profound moment, we may feel acutely present...and useless.

My friend David spoke from just such a moment when he replied privately to the question I posted on Facebook about what comes to mind when we think of being attentive and present:

"I am at this very moment having the experience of being present to life, to moments, to people. I am in the birth center with my wife who is giving birth to our second child. And as is, ironically, often true of being deeply in the moment and present in the experience, I feel utterly useless, superfluous, and unable to assist in any way.

"Perhaps being present is being able to recognize your complete limitations and absolute lack; lack of anything useful, and yet to stay. I kid you not. I dare not even speak unless spoken to, nor move unless allowed... And now you are the first ones to know aside from our parents that we are having our child tonight... Shh, don't tell."

I know what he meant. I laughed and cried at the births of each of our three children. There was a deep presence in the midst of feeling useless. Such uselessness enables a different kind of attentiveness: not to a problem to fix, but to be with someone where our presence is all we can offer.

Ultimately, of course, my friend was not useless. At that moment his wife's attention had to be elsewhere. But she sensed him and his presence will be part of their joy together. He was there and one day he will tell his daughter the story of the day she was welcomed into the world with hearts bursting.

To misquote Oliver Wendell Holmes, "I would not give a fig for the wholeness this side of emptiness, but I would give my right arm for the wholeness on the other side of emptiness." [55]



## Wisdom may be where we least expect it

The gaining of wisdom rests in part on the seemingly simple act of noticing. Of paying attention. But that 'simple' act is profound and profoundly varied. We may feel disappointed at the homeliness and simplicity of how wisdom often comes.

A glancing remembrance of an inconsequential conversation comes to us unbidden. Who knows why? We pause to mull. Patterns and themes we had not considered now come to mind: faces and gestures; phrases said in jest or muffled; and our own fragile presence. And something begins to make new sense: something significant from what seemed inconsequential.

Like wisdom, love, and fairness, we know when we are attentive and present, and when we're not. My friends, cobbled together at random by a Facebook update, opened to us profundity, diversity, provocation, and hope in a few short lines.

A friend in hospital with his wife gave us another vista. He was experiencing a heightened sense of presence at exactly in a moment where he felt absent and redundant. Ironically, he reached for a media he later described as "something of a false presence." "In that moment," he wrote later, "I had nowhere else to release my desire for presence. While my

wife was in the shower, I logged on and found...a conversation about presence and being in the moment...through a tool that is often more about absence than presence!" Wisdom may indeed be where we least expect it.

You may sense a theme in all the above. Real insight and change may be small, informal, unheralded, counter-intuitive, even paradoxical. Small stuff matters. And it matters for more than leverage. Curiosity, wonder, frailty, joy, vulnerability, embrace, grief, delight, shame—everyday moments of glory and of brokenness—ground us in how life actually is, not in how theorists say it must be. It grounds us in the simple curiosities, courtesies, and tragedies of ordinary people that are the patterns of our lives.

This too is wisdom. It is in the small acts of noticing and of being curious. It is when we fight the urge to disengage from one whom most would shun. It is here in the small things that we learn to read the big patterns. Such moments are not trivial; shaped by integrity and care, they reveal the architecture of wisdom.

The moment one gives close attention to any thing, even a blade of grass it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself. [56]

HENRY MILLER

## Wisdom is living the patterns with integrity and care

### Integrity marks the wise leader

Someone may read life well and have a fine sense of judgment. But if her personal values and integrity are questionable, we might call her clever or astute, but never wise. My interest here is in leadership that respects the value and dignity of every person. Such leadership arises from personal depth and integrity:

If a man is correct in his own person, then there will be obedience without orders being given; but if he is not correct in his own person, there will not be obedience even though orders are given. [57]

CONFUCIUS

Integrity is bringing the whole of who we are to every situation. It is to live by one's values in every relationship and encounter, no matter who the person or what the context. Integrity is a living commitment to be true to others, and holding ourselves to this commitment.

Anyone can appear to have integrity when things are going well. But when things go wrong, then character is put to the test. Will we blame, shift responsibility or humbly acknowledge our own shortcomings? Do we tear down individuals before their peers, or do we build up the whole? Do we feed gossip, or growth?

We desire to see integrity in those whom we call wise. We want to know we are dealing with the same person in every situation: a person whose values are other-centred, non-negotiable, and full-time.

Integrity is bringing the whole of who we are to every situation.

## Care marks the wise leader

Some words and phrases take us straight to the heart of things.

It was my privilege to work closely with the leaders of a large public education system. I heard leaders there use a little phrase—“on behalf of”—to provoke serious reflection on policies, strategies, and initiatives.

How was such-and-such a policy, they asked, genuinely on behalf of teachers? How was a strategy genuinely on behalf of schools and their communities? How was a pedagogical or curriculum reform on behalf of children, their learning, and their futures? I learned there is always an ‘on behalf of’ to consider.

We have all seen well-meaning leaders lose contact with the people they lead. It is a particular trap for those in support departments. Unwittingly they may lose touch with their colleagues and come to give greater weight to their finance, HR and IT systems and processes than to the colleagues they are there to serve. Ultimately, we lead on behalf of people, not an organization, system, or state.

The wise act with care. It is care that gives heart to their integrity and makes it more than duty. Like attentiveness, care can be starkly evident where we least expect it.

Some years ago I was in an airport and noticed a woman shining shoes. I had never had my shoes shined and I had some time. We started to talk, she was from Somalia. All her family had been massacred except for 3 or 4 children. She had found her way to Canada with the remaining children about 15 years before. Trained as an engineer, the only work she had been able to get was shining shoes, and she had done it cheerfully to put all her children through university. She was a woman of extraordinary pain, dignity, courage and faith. Her presence was powerful. She lived and worked ‘on behalf of’ her children. And as she shined and we chatted that day, I had the sense that for those few minutes she was also there ‘on behalf of’ me.

It is care that makes the best students of the patterns of the world. It is care that moulds discernment and thoughtful application. It is care, love even, that sustains one’s commitment to grow in wisdom and to live for a better world.



## Q. HOW DOES WISDOM HELP YOU LEAD?

- A. Wisdom is not a formula or process. Leaders know instinctively that it’s the people stuff that matters most. But reading people is hard work. Where do we start? Wisdom nurtures attentiveness in us. We listen for the words that free people to give their best and those that rob them of the power to act. We look beyond assured explanations. We learn to give equal weight to unity and diversity, and to give up the illusion of balance. We learn not to panic at complexity and ambiguity. Nor to dumb things down. We begin to think and communicate by stories more than abstract definitions. These are some ways wisdom helps us lead. We’ve only just begin to answer that question.

## SUMMARY

WISDOM AND  
THE PATTERNS  
OF LIFE**Wisdom is reading well the patterns of life**

- Nothing matters like wisdom
- We draw wisdom from life
- Wisdom is close at hand
- Wisdom is not law, morality, process nor formula
- Wisdom is reading well the patterns of life
- The patterns help make sense of the complex tapestry of life
- The patterns of the natural order teach us about life
- Wisdom holds unity and diversity in tension
- The patterns of people teach us about life
- Wisdom traditions emphasize how words change things

**Wisdom is translating well the patterns of life**

- Wisdom is marked by an ability to sit with ambiguity and complexity
- Reading patterns is inadequate.
- Wisdom requires the hard work of discerning context
- Wisdom sometimes means unmasking foolishness

**Wisdom is staying open to the patterns of life**

- It is one thing to know and another to notice
- Everyone is attentive but not in the same ways
- Sometimes we have to be 'useless' to be present
- Wisdom may be where we least expect it

**Wisdom is living the patterns with integrity and care**

- Integrity marks a wise leader
- Care marks a wise leader

## ENDNOTES

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31. Confucius, *Analects*, book xiv, 31.
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38. Attributed to Democritus in Stobaeus, *Anthology*, II xv 40 (B177). Possibly as early as c700BC.

39. Confucius, *Analects*, book xv, 8. Confucius' life is traditionally dated 551-479BC.

40. Various drawn from the sources cited in notes 30-39.

41. Attributed to Empedocles in Simplicius, *Physics*, B171 2

42. Plato, *Republic*, 507B.

43. Mencius, *Book VII*, A.

44. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, page 9.

45. Commonly attributed to Paulo Coelho. Source unknown.

46. Proverbs 2:2.

47. Proverbs 5:1.

48. Commonly attributed to Jose Ortega Gasset. Source unknown.

49. Anna Goldsworthy, *Piano Lessons* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2009).

50. *Piano Lessons*, 4, 8, 13, 17, 231. The awkward idiom is true to the text and reflects Eleonora Sivan speaking English as a second language. Sivan was a Russian prodigy trained at the height of Stalinist cruelty and materialism to be an exemplar of Soviet supremacy. In the midst of an oppressive regimentation, Sivan's teachers secretly conveyed to her the beauty and humanity of music. It is this that she passed to Anna Goldsworthy.

51. Details of Stephen's life are drawn from his website: <http://www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk/> accessed on October 3, 2012. See also [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVqRT\\_kCOLI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVqRT_kCOLI).

52. Oliver Sacks. See for example *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York, Touchstone Books, 1985). Ref.

Stephen Wiltshire in the chapter "Prodigies," in his book *An Anthropologist on Mars* (New York: Vintage, 1995). See <http://www.oliversacks.com/>.

53. Henry David Thoreau, American philosopher and writer (1817-1862). From his 1854 publication, *Walden or Life in the Woods*. Cited from the Penn State Electronic Classics Series publication, page 11, accessed at <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/thoreau/thoreau-walden6x9.pdf> on September 17, 2012.

54. On Schwartz see <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/bschwar1/>. His TED talk is at [http://www.ted.com/talks/barry\\_schwartz\\_on\\_the\\_paradox\\_of\\_choice.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/barry_schwartz_on_the_paradox_of_choice.html).

55. The following saying is attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Snr: "I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my right arm for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." The saying is nonetheless unsourced.

56. Henry Miller, American writer and painter (1891-1980). See his (2012), *Plexus*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics. London: Harper Collins, page 40.

57. Confucius, *Analects*, book xiii, 6.