

# Love, Forgiveness, and Trust: Critical Values of the Modern Leader

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**ABSTRACT.** In a world that has become increasingly dependent upon employee ownership, commitment, and initiative, organizations need leaders who can inspire their employees and motivate them individually. Love, forgiveness, and trust are critical values of today's organization leaders who are committed to maximizing value for organizations while helping organization members to become their best. We explain the importance of love, forgiveness, and trust in the modern organization and identify 10 commonalities of these virtues.

**KEY WORDS:** love, forgiveness, trust, ethical leadership, caring

The ability of leaders to resonate (Boyatzis and McKee, 2005) with others at the affective level (Staub, 2002; Steinbrecher and Bennett, 2003) is well acknowledged as an important element of emotional (Rybach, 1998; Weisinger, 1998) and social intelligence (Albrecht, 2006; Goleman, 2006). Great leaders transform the lives of the people whom they serve (Kouzes and Posner, 2006, p. 10). "Leadership is a reciprocal relationship" (Kouzes and Posner, 2003b, p. 1), and leaders who honor their highest ethical duties (Caldwell et al., 2002) empower others to become their best while laying the foundation for creating a new world (Bennis, 2009).

We suggest that the virtues of love, forgiveness, and trust are critical foundation values of leaders in transforming lives and revitalizing relationships (cf. Boyatzis and McKee, 2005). In this article, we define love, forgiveness, and trust as leadership constructs and identify 10 commonalities about these three constructs. We conclude by identifying the contributions of this article for individuals and organizations.

## Love, forgiveness, and trust

Organizational research in recent years has acknowledged the importance of a leadership philosophy that treats people as valued assets rather than simply "as labor costs to be reduced or eliminated" (Pfeffer, 1998, p. xix). Goleman (2006) explained that people respond at both the conscious and unconscious levels to authentic leadership and observed that effective leaders had a profound influence on those whom they led as well as on the organizations that they directed. Leaders who treat colleagues with dignity, respect, and a commitment to others' best interests have found that the pay-off from that treatment comes in improved performance (Cameron et al., 2004), and leadership behaviors that "encourage the heart" have increased employee initiative and responsibility (Kouzes and Posner, 2003b, pp. 3–4). Several management scholars have suggested that when leaders consistently exhibit love, forgiveness, and trust in relationships, their employees respond with increased commitment and loyalty (Covey, 2004; Cameron et al., 2003; Pfeffer, 1998). In this section, we define love, forgiveness, and trust as organizational constructs that are freedom producing, empowering, and vital to enhancing employee self-efficacy.

### *Love in an organizational context*

The concept of love is increasingly being recognized as a responsibility of leaders in organizations. James Autry (1991, p. 17) wrote that "Good management is largely a matter of love. Or if you're uncomfortable with that word, call it caring, because proper management involves caring for people, not manipulating them." Autry's perspective on the

relationship between leadership and love is shared by others, including retired Marine Corps major and author of two books on quality, Townsend (1982, p. 24), who observed:

Perhaps the most obvious thing that leadership and love have in common is the act of caring about the welfare of others – an act that is central to both. One’s love for another implies caring for the well-being, physical and mental, of the other.

Leadership philosopher, Koestenbaum (2002, pp. 194–195), describes love as the surrender of one’s freedom to another, an act he calls “the ultimate act of love” because freedom is “the greatest gift you can ever give.” The notion of love as the gift of one’s self mirrors the idea of the leader as servant that is advocated by Greenleaf (1998a, b, 2003).

Several scholars describe love in terms of caring and an unconditional commitment to the welfare and happiness of others. Baer (2007, Chapter 1) describes this caring about others and a commitment to their welfare as “Real Love.” Dering (1998) had observed that the relational element of transformational leadership encompassed “stewardship, caring, servant leadership, and even love.” This caring for the welfare of others and a commitment to a servant leadership model changed the entire culture of the North Mississippi Medical Center and instilled a culture of caring that enabled that organization to earn the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige Award (Goonan, 2007). Pellicer (2008) has emphasized the importance of caring in moral leadership, and has observed that caring leadership reflects not what one does but what one becomes.

Autry (1991) has suggested that caring leadership adopts the philosophy that “Everyone gets special treatment around here.” Caring leadership is fully authentic in its commitment to each individual and treats others as valued partners rather than as a commodity or an inconvenience (Pfeffer, 1998). As DePree (2004, pp. 53–54) has explained, leaders owe a series of “covenantal” duties to their employees in demonstrating that they care about their welfare and are committed to their success – as well as to the success of the organization. Pellicer (2008, Chapter 22) called this commitment to others of caring leadership a sacred trust that transformed the leader,

and for Autry (1991) the notion of love and caring leadership were identical.

In his book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm explained that love requires that we treat people with an eye toward our “oneness” with them, thereby respecting them as valued ends in and of themselves rather than as a means to achieve our desires, our sought after outcomes, or our self-gratification (Fromm, 1956, p. 14). In describing the gift of love, Fromm (1956, p. 23) wrote:

What does one person give to another? He gives of himself, of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other—but that he gives of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness—of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him. In thus giving of his life, he enriches the other person, he enhances the other’s sense of aliveness by enhancing his own sense of aliveness. He does not give in order to receive; giving is in itself exquisite joy. But in giving he cannot help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life reflects back to him; in truly giving, he cannot help receiving that which is given back to him. Giving implies to make the other person a giver also and they both share in the joy of what they have brought to life. In the act of giving something is born, and both persons involved are grateful for the life that is born for both of them.

By giving, love becomes a paradoxical power which creates connection with others while enabling each person to retain their integrity and individual identity (Fromm, 1956, p. 19). At the same time, love and accountability go hand in hand and one of the characteristics of love is to teach others self-discipline, self-respect, and self-control (Peck, 2001, pp. 76–77). Kouzes and Posner (2003a, p. 235) note that leaders establish credibility and connection “when people believe that another person understands them... Developing others, helping others, increasing others’ self-esteem, and expressing genuine concern are all behaviors of credible leaders. Could it be that love is the ultimate act of earning credibility?”

In leading by example, Batten (1999, p. 14) has suggested that great leadership integrates love with other virtues in a complex combination that differs from the old command-and-control paradigm:

The enlightened leader of tomorrow will be committed to moving from pushing to leading, from telling to asking, from hating to loving, from directing to expecting, from low expectations to high expectations of self and others, from adequacy to excellence, from getting to giving, from negative to positive, from doubt to faith, from expedient morality to integrity, from competing with others to competing with self, from preoccupation with weaknesses to building on strengths, from role orientation to goal orientation.

Understanding and integrating these leadership behaviors requires an organizational perspective that acknowledges that people must be treated as “Yous” rather than as “Its” (Kaufmann, 1970), and as valued ends rather than simply as a means to achieving organizational goals (Hosmer, 2007).

When leaders demonstrate caring or love, they do so in very practical ways. Nestle USA, ITT Automotive, Cambridge Industries, and Guardian Glass are just some of the corporations that have sought to create a caring culture that emphasizes the relationship between love and leadership (Williams, 2004, p. 8). Covey (2004, p. 98) emphasized the personal commitment and caring of leadership, writing that “*leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves*” (Italics in the original). Adding that the essence of leadership is that it “influences and truly endures,” Covey (2004, p. 99) observed that great leaders treat others in the same way that grandparents love and care about their grandchildren, communicating “in as many ways as possible, the worth and potential of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.” Leaders who love those with whom they work recognize that authentic caring creates higher commitment, greater synergy, increased creativity, and improved quality (cf. Cameron, 2003).

Hunter (1998) framed successful leadership in terms of an unconditional self-sacrificing love for others without regard to personal self-interest. To love others requires that we first love ourselves – but after we love ourselves we then put our efforts at risk by caring about another, working for their welfare, and doing so without attempting to manipulate or control another’s choices or behavior (Fromm, 1956, pp. 14–15). Although love may disapprove of another’s actions and hold others accountable for those actions, the intention of love is always to do that which ultimately achieves the best interests of

the other party (Peck, 2004, pp. 150–158). Ferris (1988, p. 42) described love as “a consciously chosen mind-set that allows us to see others differently – a deep respect based upon a oneness with others.” We define love as the unconditional acts of respect, caring and kindness that communicate the worth of others and that promote their welfare, growth, and wholeness. Great leaders recognize that investing in others by demonstrating a commitment to their best interests not only strengthens relationships and enriches lives but improves organizations along the way (cf. Goleman, 2006; Caldwell et al., 2002).

#### *Forgiveness and freedom*

Although organizations rely upon people to perform tasks accurately and efficiently to accomplish intended goals (Grant, 2008), Roberts (2007, pp. 44–45) noted that mistakes result due to the failure of planned action or the use of an imperfect plan. Forgiveness, the choice to accept and to look past the faults of another and to reconcile a relationship despite a perceived betrayal (Caldwell et al., 2009), has been acknowledged as a noble quality of a compassionate and effective leader (Ferch, 2004). Forgiving another person for failing to honor a perceived duty allows that person to regain self-esteem and restores the ability of people to work together comfortably. Lennick and Kiel (2008, pp. 106–108) explained that a leader’s responsibility to serve others flows into compassion and forgiveness – but emphasized that compassion and forgiveness do not mean excusing followers from being accountable. Forgiving others and forgiving self when one makes a mistake help to create a safe culture where taking risks and being creative are encouraged, expected, and acknowledged as critical for organizations and individuals to achieve their potential (Lennick and Kiel, 2008, pp. 110–113).

Forgiveness means both letting go of one’s own mistakes and letting go of others’ mistakes while learning from and addressing those mistakes both short and long term (Lennick and Kiel, 2008, pp. 109–110). Covey (2004, p. 179) defined true forgiveness as including “forgetting, letting it go, and moving on.” Enright (2001) suggested that forgiveness benefits the forgiver far more than the person being forgiven, and noted that forgiveness is

freedom producing for both parties. Hammarskjold (2001, p. 197), the former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Prize winner, suggested that forgiveness “always entails a sacrifice” and when forgiveness is done out of love, he who forgives “takes upon himself the consequences” of what others have done.

Even organizations as disciplined as the U.S. Marines expect their members to fail, learn from those failures, and even “(t)o a certain extent they demand failure... (since) a Marine who rarely fails is a Marine who isn’t pushing the envelope enough” [Italics in the original] (Freedman, 2001, p. 109). Baucus et al. (2007) observed that leaders have an ethical duty to create an organizational culture that encourages creativity, rule-breaking, and personal initiative when doing so is both ethical and consistent with the organization’s mission and goals. Covey (2004, p. 165) noted that leaders who forgive others build personal credibility, establish moral authority, and build personal and organizational trust.

Connecting forgiveness with servant leadership, Greenleaf (1998a, b, p. 21) explained that the “servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always accepts the person, but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person’s effort or performance as good enough.” Forgiving others frees them from the burden of past mistakes and grants them the opportunity to begin anew. The concept of forgiveness is characterized by the Greek *metanoia*, which literally means the changing of one’s mind. The implication of *metanoia* is that those who have evolved from error to obedience merit the forgiveness and support of others.

Positive organizational scholarship, a new field in the study of organizations and leaders, emphasizes that the actions of organization’s leaders in seeking virtuous outcomes – including the forgiving of others – can benefit the self-esteem of others and achieve improved organizational outcomes (Cameron et al., 2003). Forgiving allows others to move forward without the burden of weight that accompanies resentment, distrust, and animosity (Smedes, 1996). Ren and Gray (2009) have noted that forgiveness is critical to repairing relationships and is an essential element in creating a culture of cooperation and commitment in the leader–follower dyad.

Barling et al. (2008) noted that authentic forgiveness is genuinely empathetic rather than self-serving and is a key factor in building trust and restoring a relationship. Traditional perspectives about revenge that justify getting even with others (Tripp et al., 2002) are inconsistent with the concept of the leader as one who unites an organization and works for the best interests of all the stakeholders (Caldwell et al., 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2003b, p. 56) opined that “(c)redible leaders are compassionate” and seek to support and sustain their team members rather than to simply punish them. Reina and Reina (2007, pp. 17–18) described forgiveness as a freedom-creating act that empowers an organization.

Anger, bitterness, and resentment deplete people’s energy and interfere with relationships and performance... Blame and resentment are toxic. They undermine morale, productivity, innovation, engagement, and erode trust. Leaders can cultivate a healing, trustworthy environment where forgiveness takes place.

Aquino et al. (2003) confirmed that the act of forgiving and the release of negative emotions benefited both the person injured and the party guilty of the breach, and were important to repairing damaged workplace relationships. Organizational leaders that go beyond a “do no harm” orientation but seek a virtuous relationship with stakeholders increase employee commitment and improved performance – two liberating factors in organizations (Bright et al., 2006). Organizations that create caring relationships that support employees, encourage risk-taking, and forgive employees, treat employees as valued “You” rather than simply as “Its” (Buber, 2008; Wilson and Ferch, 2005). It is in forgiving that a leader can facilitate the healing and uplifting of others and of self (Ferch, 2004, p. 235). Great leaders build trust, commitment, and meaning for followers because of their commitment to the welfare of others.

#### *Trust and empowerment*

Although trust is widely acknowledged to be the glue that holds relationships together “business leaders are among the least trusted groups in society” (Child and Rodrigues, 2004, p. 145). Building an

organization based upon high trust is critical to empowering employees (Chan et al., 2008, p. 444) and to encouraging extra role behavior (Organ, 1988). The social contract implicit in a trust relationship is a subjectively perceived set of expectations about the responsibilities of the parties to each other or to other stakeholders (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Schoorman et al., 2007).

Trust, though often described as a belief (Kramer, 1999), attitude (McAllister, 1995), intention (McKnight et al., 1998), willingness, disposition, or propensity (Mayer et al., 1995), is best understood within organizational contexts as a behavior (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Caldwell et al., 2009). Trust is manifest by one's actions – ultimately reflecting core beliefs, assumptions (Schein, 2004), and the depth of personal commitment (Senge, 2006). Caldwell et al. (2009, p. 117) defined trust as “the relinquishing of one's personal choice or power in the expectant hope that another party will honor the elements of the social contract between the parties.” Hosmer (1995) described trust as ethically complex and a critical variable at the intersection of economics and ethics. Trust implies a degree of risk and uncertainty (Mayer et al., 1995). Solomon and Flores (2003, p. 6) compare trust to love, noting that both acknowledge the possibility of betrayal:

We learn that trust, like love, may seem to fail us, but truly we fail at trust or love. But then we get more sophisticated. We learn that trust, like love, is an emotional skill. It requires judgment. It requires vigilant attention. It requires conscientious action. It involves all of the intricate reciprocities of a human relationship (even in cases in which it remains “unrequited”).

Authentic trust embraces the possibility of betrayal (Solomon and Flores, 2003, p. 6) but chooses to invest in others despite the risks that may be present (Caldwell and Clapham, 2003). Mayer et al. (1995, p. 724) described the behavioral nature of trust as the “risk taking in a relationship” and noted that “one must take a risk in order to engage in trusting action.” Rebuilding trust when it has eroded requires healing, and that healing is dependent upon authentically caring about others and acknowledging their imperfections, as well as recognizing that expectations about performance are subjective (Reina and Reina, 2007). It is in the willingness of the leader to

forgive a perceived violation of the relationship that allows the leader to again trust another person (Caldwell et al., 2009), and it is the leader's commitment to the other party, and his or her ability to care for that individual, which form the basis of love (cf. Senge, 2006). Thus, trust is the basis for both forgiveness and love in the leadership relationship.

Trust is acknowledged as a critical leadership factor in organizational and interpersonal relationships because the act of trusting empowers others and communicates that the leader believes in their abilities (Solomon and Flores, 2003). Employees are more willing to take risks when they trust organization leaders (Mayer et al., 1995), and it is this willingness to risk that enables organizations to achieve creative solutions (Baucus et al., 2007). Empowered employees take ownership of their jobs (Bandura, 1986), becoming “owners and partners” in striving to maximize organizational performance (Block, 1996).

A careful evaluation of the constructs of love, forgiveness, and trust suggests 10 commonalities shared by these three values:

- (1) *Measured on a continuum of commitment.* The degree to which love, forgiveness, and trust are demonstrated is manifest on a continuum (cf. Caldwell and Clapham, 2003; Mayer et al., 1995). In each case an increasing level of personal commitment reflects a greater willingness to work for the welfare and benefit of the party who is the recipient of love, forgiveness, or trust (Senge, 2006).
- (2) *Virtue-based and reflecting the desire to create added value or positive benefit for the other party.* Consistent with the concepts of Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003), persons possessing love, forgiveness, and trust seek to not only do that which is ethical and moral, but to do that which is virtuous and exceeds the level of duty expected by going above and beyond what would normally be considered the obligation owed between the parties (cf. Carroll and Buchholtz, 2008).
- (3) *Based upon a social contract obligation with the valued other.* The party demonstrating love, forgiveness, or trust willingly assumes

- obligations and explicitly or implicitly honors the responsibility to act in ways that benefit others (Hosmer, 2007). These obligations and responsibilities take on the status of a social contract to benefit the other party (cf. Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau and Rivero, 2003).
- (4) *Covenantal in scope, rising to the level of ethical stewardship.* The nature of the relationship resonates with a special connection between the parties and an unencumbered willingness to create a transformational benefit (Hacker and Roberts, 2003; Lussier and Achua, 2004). The commitment is covenantal (DePree, 2004; Pava, 2003) in its demonstration of an interest in the welfare of others and rises to the level of an ethical stewardship (Caldwell and Hayes, 2007).
  - (5) *Demonstrated by the relinquishment of personal power or control.* Rather than simply reflecting an intention, a willingness, a belief, or an attitude of support and cooperation (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), the person who chooses to love, forgive, or trust takes actions that willingly empower another and relinquish one's personal choice, power, or control to serve the interests of the valued other (Hosmer, 2007). Love, forgiveness, and trust willingly yield that personal control in the expectant hope that the other party will honor the relationship. The leader ultimately takes a risk, genuinely seeking the welfare of the person to whom love, forgiveness, or trust is given (cf. Mayer et al., 1995).
  - (6) *Reality-based and accepting of others' faults.* Love, forgiveness, and trust do not require others to be perfect but accept imperfections in others as the status quo, not withholding personal commitment and effort, despite the faults that may exist (Kouzes and Posner, 2003a). Love, forgiveness, and trust can withstand the failure of others to fully honor perceived obligations owed by others (Caldwell et al., 2009).
  - (7) *Founded on treating others as ends rather than as means.* Others are viewed as "Yous" rather than as "Its" (Buber, 2008; Covey, 2004) and are considered to be individually important ends rather than simply as a means to the accomplishment of organizational goals (Pfeffer, 1998; Kouzes and Posner, 2003). In working for the welfare of others, those who lead demonstrate a commitment to others' best interests, growth, and ongoing improvement (Freeman et al., 2006).
  - (8) *Interpreted through one's mediating lens.* The actor views the valued other through his or her subjectively interpreting mediating lens (Caldwell and Hayes, 2007). That perspective incorporates an abundance mentality that builds rather than limits and that demonstrates a commitment to honoring the relationship between a leader and those that (s)he serves (Covey, 2004).
  - (9) *Requires making oneself vulnerable and willing to take a risk.* Love, forgiveness, and trust ultimately require that a person assume personal vulnerability – entering into a risk taking relationship to invest in the welfare of the other party (Mayer et al., 1995; Sitkin and Pablo, 1992). Willingness to become vulnerable is done with the knowledge that the other party's actions may result in a significant personal detriment.
  - (10) *Based upon an optimistic hope for the future but ultimately dependent upon the other party's reciprocal behavior.* Love, forgiveness, and trust convey a willingness of one party to give of one's self to invest in the other party. This investment in another person and in the relationship is done with the expectation that both parties will ultimately benefit as a result. Although betrayal is a possibility (Reina and Reina, 2007), the person who loves, forgives, or trusts does so both because of who (s)he is, rather than solely because the other party is expected to honor an obligation.

The attributes of love, forgiveness, and trust help to create in others an increased self-esteem, a sense of personal worth and worthiness. "Leaders demonstrate by their actions that they believe in the inherent self-worth of others" (Kouzes and Posner, 2003, p. 51). Love, forgiveness, and trust build

personal connection and cement within others a sense of the leader's commitment. By exhibiting genuine love, forgiveness, and trust, leaders help others to develop in others a sense of self-efficacy (Federman, 1991) and empower others to feel that they can become more than they have ever thought possible (Covey, 2004, p. 98; Kouzes and Posner, 2003, p. 31). Great leaders "build confidence and empower their employees to seek new ways of doing things" (Benni and Nanus, 2007, p. 17). Cameron's (2008, p. 12) research has suggested that organizations led by virtuous leaders "made more money, recovered from downsizing, retained customers and employees, and were more creative and innovative" than firms where leaders have not practiced these same virtues.

### Contributions of the article

The search for a leadership relationship that fits with the needs of today's complex world is not only an ongoing challenge (Cameron, 2003) but a necessary priority to "shape a more desirable future" (Bennis and Nanus 2007, p. 220). Building trust between leaders and those with whom they work is fundamentally important, yet those who would follow others depend upon their leaders to combine character and competence (Covey, 2004), benevolence and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995), and empathy and insight (Goleman, 2006). As we have described the importance of love, forgiveness, and trust, our article has provided six major contributions to the management literature:

- (1) *It confirms the practical value of love, forgiveness, and trust as virtues that leaders can embody to motivate and inspire others.* Although Goleman (2006) and other scholars have offered evidence of the importance of leaders connecting with others at the emotional and affective level, our article provides insights about love, forgiveness, and trust that integrate these leadership virtues. By identifying 10 commonalities of these virtues, we help to clarify the nature of love, forgiveness, and trust as behaviors and explain their interrelationships in dealing with people to accomplish shared goals.
- (2) *It affirms the importance of leadership principles that put people first in creating relationships with others.* Moral leadership recognizes that the welfare, growth, and wholeness of others takes precedence over rules, and being genuinely kind and caring supersedes being right (Pava, 2003). Traditional command-and-control models that treat people merely as objects rather than as valued organizational partners (Block, 1996) miss the importance of people in creating long-term wealth (Cameron, 2003; Senge, 2006).
- (3) *It reinforces the significance of new and more behavioral leadership models in context with leadership virtues.* Benni and Nanus (2007, p. 3) have called for a new type of leader "who commits people to action, who converts followers into leaders, and who may convert leaders into agents of change." Leadership that is committed to serving others, to developing their capabilities, and to fully empowering them is virtue based and honors people while also honoring the duties owed to their organizations (Cameron, 2003; Paine, 2003; Pfeffer, 1998).
- (4) *It supports the importance of virtue-based, Positive Organizational Scholarship assumptions that seek to honor ethical duties.* The literature about Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron, 2003; Cameron et al., 2003; Quinn, 2004) integrates well with the virtues of love, forgiveness, and trust. Positive Organizational Scholarship emphasizes that "standards that avoid harm are not the same as standards that lead to doing good" (Cameron, 2006, p. 318), but virtues like love, forgiveness, and trust enrich both organizations and their members. Our article builds upon that literature in explaining the importance of leaders acting as ethical stewards who honor the obligation to pursue the creation of long-term wealth to benefit all the stakeholders (Caldwell et al., 2008).
- (5) *It challenges assumptions about traditional thinking that suggests that leaders ought to be distant and aloof from employees and avoid connecting with employees at the emotional level.* Leaders who put employees at arms-length and who view employees as commodities, means, or as

“its” still exist in many organizations today (Benni and Nanus 2007; Kouzes and Posner, 2003a, b). In a knowledge-, service-, and wisdom-based economy that is increasingly dependent upon employee commitment, ownership, and responsiveness, organizations need leaders who treat employees as valued partners, ends, and “Yous” (Covey, 2004).

- (6) *It affirms the validity of a leader embracing a leadership style that reflects a deep personal commitment to the welfare of others while working for the best interests of the organization.* Effective organizations balance a commitment to organizational outcomes with the needs of organization members – but seek to achieve both simultaneously (Collins, 2001; Paine, 2003). Organizational leaders are perceived as owing a sacred obligation to both the organization and its members (DePree, 2004, pp. 55–56). Autry (1991) described the obligation of leaders as “a sacred trust in which the well-being of people” is in their care, but leaders also have an obligation to maximize the ability of organizations to create long-term wealth (Pfeffer, 1998).

The ability of leaders to honor the obligations expected of them by a multitude of stakeholders is a challenging and burdensome responsibility. In explaining the role of effective leaders, University of Michigan scholar, Quinn (2004, p. 24), has explained that excellence in organizations is “a form of deviance, doing things that are *not* normal” [Italics in the original]. Through honoring relationships with others and caring about the welfare of those whom they serve, leaders can tap into the best within themselves and can bring out the best in others (Quinn, 2005). For more than 70 years, organizational leaders have struggled to be effective, and most leaders have fallen far short of the expectations that others have for them (Barnard, 1938).

## Conclusion

Today’s business world benefits when individuals aspire to “be their very best” (Caza et al., 2004, p. 173). As organizational leaders help others to become effective, a leadership model that is personal

and authentic enables leaders to touch the hearts of those with whom they work – encouraging colleagues to both become their best and to achieve the excellence required to excel in a global marketplace.

Although there may undoubtedly be critics and cynics who consider a virtue-based leadership style “too soft” for today’s highly competitive business environment, we suggest that caring leaders can be as passionately committed to organizational excellence as any other leadership model (cf. Covey, 2004). The strategic competitive advantage that leadership offers when it creates a culture of love, forgiveness, and trust is that it unlocks and empowers the untapped capabilities, overcomes the withheld commitment, and dissipates the reluctant distrust so prevalent in other leadership models that lack an authentic interest in the welfare of employees and other stakeholders (cf. Benni and Nanus, 2007; Kouzes and Posner, 2003b). Perhaps, the greatness of a culture that embraces love, forgiveness, and trust as its core values is that it seeks to create not a perfect work environment but an enduring one – an environment that touches hearts, inspires individuals to self-discovery, and builds relationships that extend beyond the context of work alone to help people in all the facets of their lives.

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