



# The Role of Conscious Leadership

## in Transforming Humanity

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Richard Barrett

## An interview with Richard Barrett by the World Consciousness Alliance (WCA)

### Introduction

COVID 19 has reshaped our everyday lives and impacted our businesses. While there are various scenarios possible for our future, one thing is sure; the pandemic has forced us to re-examine our values. To resolve our global issues, we need to shift from a focus on ME to a focus on WE. Instead of trying to be the best in the world, we need to seek to be the best for the world.

Richard Barrett and his team at the [Academy for the Advancement of Human Values](#) are coaching and transforming leaders and organizations worldwide. They bring a new holistic perspective to individual, organizational, and societal levels of development.

**WCA: Many have heard about "Conscious Leadership", but not too many know what it means. Can you explain?**

**RB:** Whether you are a leader or not, in my model of the seven stages of development, the fourth stage is all about becoming conscious.

There are three aspects to becoming conscious.

1. Becoming aware of the impact of your actions and behaviours on other people and the planet.
2. Becoming aware of the impact of your thoughts and beliefs on your mental and physical health.
3. Caring about the impact of your actions and behaviours on other people, and caring about the impact of your thoughts and beliefs on your mental and physical health.

All these must be in place to become conscious. We are talking about shifting to a level of awareness beyond our own survival – a level of consciousness that is inclusive of others and supports the common good.

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Every living creature is conscious. I define consciousness as awareness with a purpose, and the purpose of everything that is conscious is to maintain its internal stability and external equilibrium. This statement applies to a frog, a giraffe, a lion, a human being, a nation or an organization. To survive, they must continuously seek to maintain internal stability and external equilibrium in our ever-changing world. If you cannot maintain internal stability and external equilibrium, you will not survive – end of the story.

The difference between animals such as alligators, lizards etc. and human beings is that the former survive by taking care of their own needs. In contrast, the latter survive by taking care of the needs of the larger community. If you are a human being, you must care about other people's needs if you want to survive. Most people behave like animals and only look after themselves. They are unaware of how their behaviours impact others. They are not conscious.

You enter the fourth stage of human development, which the internationally known psychologist, Carl Jung, called Individuation. This is when you begin to realize that your actions impact the lives of others and the environment. This is also the stage when we become aware of how our thoughts and beliefs influence our mental and physical health.

Up to, and including your early 20s, you have been learning how to fit into your environment to be successful – to get your needs met. But when you reach your late 20s and early 30s, you begin to ask, who am I outside of my parental and cultural conditioning. What do I believe? What are my values? That is the onset of the individuating stage of development. Many people on the planet never reach this stage because they are too focused on their survival, relationship, and self-esteem needs – the needs of the first three stages of development.

When you get to the next stage of development – the self-actualization stage, you begin to search for meaning and purpose. When I reached this stage in my life, I was a transportation engineer working at the World Bank. I loved my work, primarily because I was very successful, and it gave me a sense of status and money. When I reached my mid-40s, I began to feel bored with my career. That is when I realized my life purpose was transformation, not transformation. So, I stopped being a transportation engineer, left the World Bank and started doing what I do now. The following diagram shows the Seven Stages of Personal Development.

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## LEVELS OF IDENTITY

## STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT



**WCA:** You mentioned autonomy and transformation. Some people claim that 2021 will be the year of transformation, and some are just waiting to go back "to normal". We can see huge changes due to the global crisis, but is humanity going to transform?

**RB:** That is the million-dollar question. I believe we will. First, however, we need to understand what transformation means. Change is doing what I do now but doing it differently. Transformation is a new way of being, with a new set of values. Each time you move through a development stage, you go through a transformation, which involves a shift in values and a shift in identity.

When you are single, you care about yourself; that is normal. When you get married, and there are two of you, you must expand your sense of identity to include the other person. If you care just about yourself and not the other person, the marriage will not last very long. Similarly, when you have children, you must expand your sense of identity again. At each development stage, our identity expands. As our sense of identity expands, our consciousness also expands. *Expanding your consciousness means caring about an increasingly larger, more inclusive group.*

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When you reach the self-actualizing stage of development you start to look for meaning and purpose in your life, and you begin to care about and identify with your organization because your organization is the vehicle you use to find meaning and purpose in your life. However, this will not happen if you do not share the values of your organization. Now, it's not just you that you care about; it's your partner, your children, your local community and your organization.

Then your organization starts to work in collaboration with other organizations, which share similar values. Once again, your sense of identity expands to include the more extensive group of people, and then that larger group of organizations may start to care about the planet. So now you expand your sense of identity to include the whole world.

Each shift in identity represents a new stage of psychological development and an expanded level of consciousness. *Consciousness expands by becoming more inclusive.*

**WCA: It was interesting that you mentioned how people feel good about an organization when they can identify with the organization's values. That is why some corporate leaders decide to run culture campaigns, but as far as I can see, the primary motivation for most of them is profit. What do you think about that?**

**RB:** That is true. However, when an organization cares about meeting its employees' needs, the employees will care about the organization.

Professor Robert Kegan, who used to be at Harvard University, wrote a book about the importance of becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization. I agree with that idea. At each stage of development, you have specific needs. When you need freedom and autonomy – the individuating stage of development – you don't want your boss micromanaging you and telling you what to do all the time.

When you move to the next stage of development, where you want to find meaning and purpose in your work, you want to find work that aligns with your gifts and talents. At the next stage of development, you want to use your skills and talents to make a difference in the world.

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What you need to do as a leader is to allow these different groups of people to fulfil their needs at the development stage they are at. Then you will have people who are incredibly loyal and engaged. Everyone wants to work for an organization where they can get their needs met.

*There is a fundamental link between how organizations respond to people's stage of development and employee engagement. Engagement increases as you meet your employees most essential needs.*

That is what leaders need to recognize: to create a successful organization, they need to care about their employees' needs – that means becoming a deliberately developmental organization.

*So, this is my message to leaders. If you want a successful organization, care about the needs of your employees.*

**WCA: In one of your interviews, I heard you talk about three leadership mantras. One of them was that organizational transformation begins with the transformation of the leaders. Can you say more?**

**RB:** The organizational culture reflects the values and beliefs of the leaders. So, if you want to transform your organization, either the leaders must change, or you must change the leaders. It is as simple as that. Organizations are authoritarian regimes. They are not democratic: the leader gets to define what happens in the organization. The values and beliefs of the leader become the culture of the organization. So, if you want to improve the culture, then you must change the values and beliefs of the leader, or you must change the leader. Enlightened leaders understand this, but mostly they are not enlightened - they focus on the bottom line and not the culture they have created.

**WCA: They don't get it because they don't think the results of investing in organizational culture are not tangible?**

**RB:** Exactly. But the results of investing in the culture *are* tangible. I have measured organizational cultures for over 20 years with the Barrett Values Centre. We have been doing it all over the world in 40 or 50 different languages. The leader must get to a point where they recognize that to improve the organization, the culture needs to change, and for the culture to change, the leader needs to change.

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**WCA:** Your team recently did research with more than 2,000 participants measuring the values of organizations before, during and after COVID 19. What were the results?

**RB:** Yes. All of this is well reported on the Barrett Values Centre website – [www.valuescentre.com](http://www.valuescentre.com). COVID-19 has had quite an interesting impact on organizational culture. Employers realized that they needed to protect their employees, so they developed schemes like working from home and holding online meetings. Employees liked that. They felt good about it because they didn't have to travel to work two hours every day, which is a complete waste of time. They asked themselves: "What do I do with this extra time? Oh well, I could do some professional E-learning courses". Then some employers said, "Well, we need to care about the families of our employees too." So, they devised schemes to help the families of their employees. This approach was more compassionate, which is a high-level value. There will be no going back on this in the future.

**WCA:** You wrote somewhere: "*We can only succeed individually if everyone in our global society succeeds*". What did you mean by that?

**RB:** First, let's ask the question: what does success mean? For some people, at the lower stages of development, success means money, fame, things like that, but for people at higher stages development, it means meaning and purpose and a focus on relationships. This leads to a more profound sense of wellbeing.

Let me illustrate what I mean by citing the results of the Harvard University Grant Study. In this study, they have been following a group of 200 people for 75 years, interviewing them every two or three years. They analyzed the data to find out what are the contributory factors for a long and happy life. The result is fascinating. What makes people makes people happy and fulfilled is a straightforward factor – the quality of their relationships. It is a simple as that. The bottom line from the Harvard Grant Study is that *long-term happiness is not about fame; it's not about fortune; it's about the quality of relationships*.

**WCA:** What about the most frequent question being asked in 2020, "Are we going to go back to normal"?

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**RB:** The answer is a resounding, no, we will never get back to what used to be normal because, at every step, something is changing. Change is the only constant in life.

Ten years ago, I wrote: The most evolved leaders recognize that society is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the environment. If the environment crashes, society will crash. I also said that business is a wholly-owned subsidiary of society. If society crashes, business will crash as well.

COVID-19 is a perfect example of society crashing and business crashing. The pandemic affected businesses all over the world. Companies have been going bankrupt everywhere. There is a fundamental link between business and society, which has pretty much been ignored up to this point.

The new idea that comes out of the pandemic is this; *leaders have to start caring about society* because if they don't, their businesses will crash. This is a new role for business.

For companies to become more resilient, they must care about employees, care about society, and care about the environment. That is what I call the new leadership paradigm.<sup>[1]</sup>

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1. **Richard Barrett, [The New Leadership Paradigm](#)**. ↑