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Dear Reader

These are difficult times. We were struggling for some time about what would be the best contribution we could make in this issue. While we had several articles ready to go, to talk about performance measurement, or the role of multinational HR professionals, or diverse teams, seemed somehow to lack relevance to what is occurring in our world today. So we asked ourselves what would we like to say?

The answer came soon. As we are inundated by events, battered by news reports we realized it is increasingly difficult to make meaning out of our reality. Or perhaps our surreality, since television, as in no other war before, seems to offer us the disturbing choice of being voyeurs. Images crowd on images, sound bites on sound bites. There is no time to pause, to reflect on what this situation means, implies, what we can learn from it, how it makes us feel, how it matches our expectations or our hopes, our ambitions or fears. We seem caught in a frantic stream that is pushing us downstream, tumbling over the most frightening rapids.

So we decided to make this pause. Magically, my hands fell over the "Tao at Work, On Leading and Following", by Stanley Herman (Jossey-Bass, 1994). What follows is a series of extracts from that book, meaningful, profound and just in time.

Enjoy the pause.

Isabel Rimanoczy, Tony Pearson, Editors

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Pause and Reflect

Selected Extracts from *The Tao at Work*, by Stanley M. Herman

While in the midst of coping with difficulty, complexity and pressure, it's useful to pause from time to time and remind yourself of the obvious. This book is about the obvious. I suppose that, in some measure, I have always been captivated by the obvious. It has usually seemed such a sound base on which to build intelligent complexity – when that needs to be done- and such a comfortable place to return to when I need some relief from complexity or a "sanity check" of its relevance.

Most of this book is a version of a twenty-five-hundred-year-old tract, dictated by a person named Lao-tzu,

called the Tao (translation: the way along which one passes in going from one place to another). In Taoist folklore, as Lao-tzu is about to depart his city, possibly for the last time, the gatekeeper at the city wall asks him if he is willing to leave a legacy of his wisdom for those who are to come. Lao-tzu is at first reluctant, but eventually he bows to the gatekeeper's urging and recites eighty-one verses, which the gatekeeper writes down. From that time to the present, those eighty-one verses have been translated and interpreted time and time again throughout the world. Probably no other work has inspired as many versions.

Because of the nature of Chinese character writing (a single character can represent a large number of things and ideas), it is literally impossible to translate Lao-tzu's verses without interpreting them. (...) Practicality is the key to this version of Lao-tzu's work. It will teach you nothing new, only remind you of things you already know."

You can choose how you think and what you act upon

You can center your attention on what is real and valid according to your own observations and experiences, or you can become a contributor to the latest, most fashionable Tower of Babel.

If you choose to be a tower builder, you put on the uniform of a particular profession or trade or political movement or social or economic group. You can go along and get along. You pledge allegiance to your group's slogans and interpret events according to its generalizations.

If you choose to be a reality hunter, you place yourself somewhat apart from the popular view and concentrate on discovering what is going on beneath the slogans.

Both courses have their advantages and disadvantages. If you choose to help build the tower, sooner or later you will be disappointed. What is supposed to happen (according to the slogans) doesn't happen, and you are thrown on your own devices. If you choose to be a reality hunter you will find the hunt is not an easy one, and in times, it can get lonesome.

Some choose one course and some the other to travel their lives. A few recognize that both have validity. To respect popular generalizations but not depend on them is healthy. To increase your capacity for coping with their crucial exceptions is a skill. The important moves in your life are made when you depart from your usual pattern, whether by necessity or choice.

Many people are reflexive partisans

They instantly compare, contrast, and form opinions for or against everything that comes over their horizon. They join causes and take positions. They wave their arms about politics, social issues, economics, ethics, and other people. Once a reflexive partisan takes a position or chooses a side, it becomes the flag of his ego. His own personal sense of victory or defeat, worthiness or worthlessness, becomes dependent on his cause.

It is better not to set your stance too soon or champion it too adamantly. As time winds forward there will be more to see than can be seen at present- but only if your eyes remain open.

For a wiser course, take a moment to recognize the foundation for other opinions along the continuum before you choose a position. If you are able, consider the continuum itself. Comprehending all opinions will enable you to better govern the arena of debate.

No matter the conditions

No matter what the conditions, an outstanding leader realizes that his interconnections with those he leads, those who lead him, and the situation he faces are perfect.

A sound leader knows too that he ought not call those he leads from too far ahead, nor demand of them abruptly what they find too unfamiliar or uncomfortable to give. Ego and compulsion to control are enemies

of sound leadership. Asserting your position by maligning the opposition is of limited use. A loud assertion of your position and importance may be exhilarating, but it can freeze your maneuverability.

Be cautious of the leader who shines too brilliantly. He may dazzle for a while, but when his glitter fades, those who have not illuminated their own paths will be left in the dark. A driving wind pushes what is before it only when it blows ceaselessly. It imparts none of its energy, but only exhausts both itself and the objects of its force. When it stops blowing, what is before it stops moving. So it is with a driving leader.

In the midst of the crisis

In the midst of the crisis – surrounded by its perils, stressed by its demands, confused by its issues, worried by its consequences – step aside and breathe. As all athletes, know, tightening does not improve performance, distraction slows, anxiety makes you miss.

Step aside and breathe. Take a break. Still the closed-loop message that speeds inside your head, and listen for a moment to silence. Then, afterward, hear a fresher message.

Do not be concerned that others do not follow the way or value it

(...) There is no need to reform the world. Reform yourself, you reform your family.

Reform yourself, you reform your workplace.

Reform yourself, you reform your nation.

Reform yourself, you reform the world.

Thus by yourself you accomplish all change, in family, workplace, nation, and the world. Not by the power of the sword you wield but of the lens through which you view.

Promises

Promises made too easily are hard to fulfill. Deny problems, and problems multiply. Underestimate difficult, and difficulty escalates. Facing troubles early and sensibly, the wise person manages well. His problems and difficulties do not compound.

Those who follow, those who don't

Those who follow the way are no more noble than those who do not. Who can say that those who do not follow the way are not following the way?

Life's process produces paradoxes large and small, yet does so in an orderly way; is questioned repeatedly, yet gives answers without limit; tolerates diverse points of view, yet insists on change; articulates no goal; yet gets its way.

Life's system is wide open, yet no one escapes it.

A Zen Tale

The son of a rich merchant wanted to meet a famous Zen Master, to learn about what is important in life. He traveled until he arrived at the place where the Master lived. An assistant welcomed him, and asked what he was looking for.

The student explained that he was looking for enlightenment and wisdom, and

wanted to learn about them from the famous teacher. The assistant walked out and came back soon after.

- "The Master said he will not see you until you have walked through the premises carrying in your hand this little spoon, and making sure the water it contains does not get spilled", he said, and gave the spoon carefully to the student.

The student took the spoon and began walking very carefully through the hallways and the gardens. A couple of hours later, he finished the tour and went to see the assistant.

The assistant asked him how it had gone.

The student proudly exhibited the spoon, still carrying the water as in the beginning.

The assistant asked:

- Tell me, what did you see during your walk through the premises?

The student was perplexed. He had been paying so much attention to the water in his spoon, that he couldn't recall anything of the places he had walked through.

The assistant indicated:

- This is not good. The Master will not see you then. Come back tomorrow.

The next day the student came back, and the assistant welcomed him again.

- I will give you another chance: take the spoon with the water again, and walk through the premises, but make sure you observe carefully everything that is to be seen, so you can describe it to me in full detail.

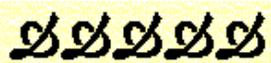
The student took the spoon and departed, eager to fulfill his task better than on the previous day. He stopped at every corner of the building, admired every sculpture, then went out and studied the different flowers and trees of the gardens, and observed the birds and the creeks. This journey took him longer than he had imagined and at the end of the day he came back, ready to report in full detail to the assistant and so gain access to the Master.

The assistant asked:

-What happened to the water in your spoon?

The student looked down at the spoon and realized that there was no more water in it. He had been so keen to appreciate everything in the surroundings, that he had forgotten the water in the spoon.

He then realized why the Master was so famous. The student was suddenly enlightened and had found the answers he was searching for. He left, without meeting the Master.



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