



LEADERSHIP • CONSCIOUSNESS • TRANSFORMATION

From inner transformation to transformational leadership

The leadership our changing world requires begins with the willingness to transform within.

From inner transformation to transformational leadership

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Abstract

Today's interconnected crises require more than technical expertise, strategic thinking, and efficient management. They require leaders who can remain grounded in uncertainty, recognize the unconscious patterns influencing their decisions, and engage consciously with profound change.

This article explores the difference between change and transformation and introduces the transformational—or Alchemist—leader. It describes a developmental journey in which personal crisis can become inner transformation, pain gives way to vision, and leadership shifts from position and ambition towards purpose and service. Its central premise is that leaders can guide deep transformation around them only when they are willing to enter that process within themselves.

A world in transformation

We are not approaching a time of profound change—we are already living in it.

Climate disruption, artificial intelligence, pressure on food systems, and an overwhelming flow of conflicting information are reshaping our world. As the distinction between human- and machine-generated content becomes increasingly difficult to recognize, even our understanding of what is “real” is being challenged.

At the same time, governments, religions, and other institutions that provided direction for centuries no longer offer the same certainty to everyone. This leads to profound questions about identity, meaning, and the future.

These developments do not represent only a crisis. They also create an opportunity for individual and collective transformation. How we move through this period will depend partly on our inner stability and on our ability to remain conscious when familiar reference points disappear.

It is up to our generation to help shape the world we leave to our children. Doing so will require a different kind of leadership.

■ Why another kind of leadership is needed

The kind of leadership a society requires changes as that society evolves.

At different moments in history, physical strength, military power, technical knowledge, political influence, or financial expertise determined who was considered capable of leading. These qualities helped build and manage many of the structures on which modern society depends.

They remain important, but they are no longer sufficient on their own. Today's challenges are interconnected and unfold simultaneously across social, ecological, technological, economic, organizational, and personal levels.

In such circumstances, leadership cannot be limited to managing existing structures more efficiently. We also need leaders who can question the assumptions beneath those structures, remain present when familiar solutions no longer work, and recognize possibilities that do not yet fit within established frameworks.

When leaders are strongly identified with the systems, roles, and beliefs that are being challenged, uncertainty can become an existential threat. Decisions may then be driven by fear, control, blame, or the need to protect an established identity.

The level of disruption we experience will therefore depend not only on external events, but also on the inner stability and awareness of those responsible for guiding others through them.

■ What is a transformational leader

What I call a transformational leader closely resembles the “Alchemist” leader described by David Rooke and William R. Torbert. In their [Harvard Business Review research](#), Alchemist leaders represented just 1% of the sample.

In practice, transformational leadership is the capacity to guide change around you from a place of inner stability and awareness. Transformational leaders remain grounded in challenging situations and help others navigate uncertainty. Their leadership arises not merely from the role they hold, but from a deeper sense of purpose.

They often operate at the edge of existing systems. They may not be involved in every level of daily execution, but they can play an important role when decisions touch the roots of an organization, community, or society and carry significant long-term consequences.

They see beyond established frameworks and recognize possibilities others may overlook. At the same time, they understand the distance between present reality and the vision they carry. They have the patience to wait for the right moment—and the courage and focus to act when that moment arrives.

They may become most visible during periods of crisis. Their involvement does not arise only from duty or formal responsibility, but from an inner recognition that their presence or action is required.

Their leadership is rooted in service and reaches beyond status, convention, or profit.

■ Transformation is more than change

Change and transformation are often used as if they mean the same thing. I understand them as different processes.

Change reorganizes existing elements. It adapts, improves, replaces, or redirects what is already present. Transformation reaches deeper: the new form may bear little resemblance to the old one, even though something essential continues through it.

A seed offers a useful image. The tree carries the same DNA as the seed, but its form is entirely different. The seed cannot preserve itself and become the tree at the same time. It must release its existing form without being able to see precisely what will emerge.

Human transformation can feel similar. The roles, beliefs, relationships, or ambitions that once provided stability may no longer support what is developing. Old reference points begin to lose their meaning before a new direction has become clear.

This interval can feel like being suspended between two realities. The old life no longer fits, while the new one cannot yet be fully seen. It may be experienced as a period of anxiety, disorientation, loss, or what spiritual traditions sometimes call a “dark night of the soul.”

The strength of the crisis often relates to the degree of identification with the form that is being left behind. The more completely a person's identity depends on a position, achievement, belief system, or social role, the more threatening its transformation may feel.

■ Transformation begins within the leader

A leader's inner world does not remain separate from the way they exercise responsibility.

Unresolved fears, formative experiences, and unconscious patterns can influence how a person responds to criticism, conflict, uncertainty, failure, and power. When these dynamics remain unseen, they may be projected onto colleagues, organizations, families, or society.

A need for recognition may become excessive ambition. Fear of failure may become control. Experiences of humiliation or rejection may produce defensiveness, mistrust, or a continual need to prove oneself. Under pressure, these reactions can shape significant decisions without the leader being fully aware of them.

Transformational leaders are not people who have eliminated every personal difficulty. They are people who are willing to examine their reactions, confront their blind spots, and take responsibility for what they bring into the systems they lead.

Their authority does not come from theory. It is rooted in lived experience.

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Only by learning to remain present within their own difficult processes can leaders offer genuine stability when individuals, organizations, or communities enter periods of profound uncertainty. In this sense, transformational leadership requires leaders to embody what they ask of others.

■ When the pain pushes

The movement towards transformational leadership often begins with friction.

A leader may have achieved professional success and taken on significant responsibility, yet begin to feel that their current role no longer reflects who they are becoming. Work that once provided motivation may feel empty. Established priorities can lose their meaning. Burnout, inner conflict, fear, or existential questioning may arise.

These experiences should not automatically be interpreted as a spiritual or developmental process; they may also require appropriate medical or psychological support. But they can indicate that an established way of living is no longer sustainable.

At first, the person may try to repair the situation without questioning its foundations: change jobs, assume another leadership position, reorganize the same priorities, or search for a new achievement. Such changes can be valuable, but they do not necessarily address the deeper conflict.

Transformation begins when maintaining the old form has become more painful than entering the unknown. I describe this as the point at which the pain pushes.

At this stage, the person becomes willing to examine the identity, beliefs, and protective structures on which their life has been built. This is rarely an on-off event. It is a gradual movement with many stages, moments of resistance, and periods of integration.

“First the pain pushes. Then the vision begins to pull.”

■ When the vision pulls

As limiting patterns lose some of their influence, another movement becomes possible.

The leader is no longer motivated primarily by discomfort or the need to escape an unsustainable situation. A wider vision begins to emerge. Instead of only being pushed by pain, the person starts to be pulled by a sense of direction and purpose.

This does not require withdrawing from material reality. Transformational leaders remain involved in organizations, financial decisions, social structures, and practical

responsibilities. What changes is their degree of entanglement with these realities.

Their position is no longer the primary source of their identity. Their experience, networks, resources, and credibility can then be placed in the service of a purpose that reaches beyond personal recognition.

This may result in a movement from executive responsibility towards advisory, mentoring, or societal leadership. It may also lead someone to remain in the same position while inhabiting it from a fundamentally different level of awareness.

■ Leadership as service

Transformational leadership often arises from an inner call to serve.

Service does not mean self-sacrifice, passivity, or the denial of personal needs. It means that leadership is no longer centered exclusively on individual ambition, organizational status, or profit maximization.

A transformational leader may work in business, politics, education, ecology, therapy, community development, or within a family. In each setting, leadership can contribute to a wider movement:

- In a therapeutic context, it can support personal healing and development.
- In an organization, it can contribute to social, ecological, economic, or cultural change.
- In a family, it can interrupt transgenerational patterns of trauma, manipulation, addiction, or emotional suffering.
- In a community, it can help create structures that support greater awareness and collective well-being.

The external form differs, but the underlying orientation is similar. The leader's development is placed in the service of something larger than the individual.

■ Moving beyond division

Periods of instability activate survival mechanisms. They can intensify identification with nationality, ideology, religion, status, race, gender, or other aspects of identity. They can also strengthen the tendency to divide the world into opposing groups and search for someone to blame.

A transformational leader must be able to recognize this movement, both in society and within themselves.

Moving beyond dualistic thinking does not mean losing discernment, becoming passive, or refusing to take a position. It means developing the ability to act clearly without reducing reality to “us versus them” and without dehumanizing those who hold another perspective.

This combination of inner strength, awareness, and compassion cannot be convincingly performed as a leadership technique. It emerges through sustained inner work.

■ Self-leadership as an ongoing practice

Transformational leadership is not a permanent status someone achieves. It is an ongoing process.

Leaders can continue to encounter attachment, fear, ambition, blind spots, and protective reactions. What develops is their capacity to recognize these movements and work with them before they unconsciously take control.

For some, this process is supported by meditation, reflection, body-based practices, time in nature, or other forms of conscious inner work. The specific practice matters less than the willingness to remain attentive and continue developing.

This creates self-leadership: the ability to stay connected with oneself while responding to what a situation requires.

The grounded presence of a leader also affects the surrounding field. Especially during periods of uncertainty, it can provide others with the space to think, feel, and respond with greater awareness.

■ The role of leadership mentoring

Leadership mentoring can support people at different stages of this development.

Some leaders recognize that their established role or way of working must change but do not yet understand what is happening. Others are already in the middle of an intense inner transition and need a stable point of reference while familiar structures are dissolving.

More developed transformational leaders may seek confidential reflection and intervention. They may want to deepen their awareness, refine their understanding of transformational processes, or explore projects with a wider social impact.

My contribution is to guide leaders through their inner transformation and help them translate what they discover into their own field of leadership.

The challenges visible on the surface of a person's work or relationships often provide an entrance to the deeper dynamics beneath them. By understanding and transforming these dynamics, leaders can develop more space, balance, and stability in their daily functioning.

■ A practical approach to consciousness

My engineering background has shaped a practical, down-to-earth, and structured approach to transformational processes.

I see the conscious and subconscious mind as an interconnected flow chart made up of experiences, beliefs, emotional imprints, and automatic reactions. When we identify the parameters sustaining a limiting pattern, we can begin to change its outcomes.

The process starts with an in-depth online assessment. We explore the current challenges and identify the recurring

dynamics influencing the person's leadership, relationships, and decisions.

Once these dynamics have been decoded, we trace limiting patterns back to the experiences in which they were formed. In a safe and carefully held setting, clients revisit these experiences with greater awareness and at a pace appropriate to them.

This process can allow emotions and what I describe as blocked energy to be processed and released, creating greater freedom and balance in how a person lives and leads.

This inner freedom creates space to choose consciously rather than react from old conditioning. The client can then bring what has changed within into their relationships, decisions, and area of responsibility.

Because this work often touches sensitive personal and professional material, strict confidentiality is fundamental. I do not publicly identify clients or use their experiences for promotion.

■ From inner transformation to wider impact

A leader's inner development does not end with the individual.

When leaders become more aware of what drives them, they can relate differently to responsibility, power, conflict, and uncertainty. They become less likely to reproduce unconscious patterns within the systems they influence.

Their previous accomplishments do not need to be rejected. Professional expertise, organizational structures, networks, and credibility can become powerful resources when aligned with a deeper purpose.

The movement from inner transformation to external impact is the essential step in transformational leadership. What has been developed within the leader becomes available to the organization, family, community, or society.

“Inner transformation becomes meaningful when it changes how we meet the world.”

■ The leadership our time requires

The present global transition will not be guided by one type of leader alone. We will continue to need experts, organizers, strategists, decision-makers, and people capable of managing complex institutions.

But we will also need leaders who can work at the roots of transformation.

These leaders are willing to question their own assumptions before imposing answers on others. They can remain present when old certainties disappear and help others move through the space between what is ending and what has not yet taken form.

They integrate practical responsibility with expanded awareness. Their actions arise from service rather than personal ambition alone, and their authority is supported by their willingness to walk the path themselves.

Their work begins within, but it does not end there. By transforming the consciousness from which they lead, they help create the conditions for transformation around them—and contribute to the world we leave to future generations.

Further information
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