

## Lessons from a Buddhist monk

**R**ecently, I participated in a meditation retreat led by a Buddhist monk at Cedar Valley Retreat Center in West Bend. The experience is permanently imprinted in my heart, and I am often drawn to reflect on the leadership lessons I learned from Phra David, deepened in the silence of the retreat.

Venerable Ajan David Chutiko (Phra David) was ordained a Buddhist monk at age 56. Raised as a Catholic in Medford, Mass., Chutiko served in the Air Force in Asia before becoming a wealthy businessman in California. He later met a Thai Buddhist leader who inspired him to make a retreat in Thailand, setting a trajectory that led to his ordination as a Buddhist monk.

Phra David's first seven years were spent living alone in a redwood forest on a small mountain in Northern California. He went into town to beg for his food.

At age 74, his self-effacing humor, razor sharp clarity and gentle kindness draw others in. During our weekend retreat, Phra David offered many lessons. Three have stayed with me.

### **If you are not speaking from your heart, you have nothing worth saying.**

I was struck by the simplicity and challenge of this statement. As leaders, we often fall into the trap of believing that we need to have the answers and articulate the solution in order to inspire others to follow. What employees long for is authentic leadership. We are not interested in the blah-blah-blah that masks the truth. Employees long for leaders who, in the words of Max Depree, "clarify the vi-

sion, reinforce values and say thank you."

Leaders who speak from the heart, risk being vulnerable. Employees long for leaders who have the courage to say: "I am sorry" or "I don't know." It requires setting one's ego aside in a world that celebrates the illusion of "being right." Yet every time we forfeit authenticity for illusion we contribute to a false notion of leadership which only perpetuates a level of collective cynicism. If you are not speaking from your heart, you have nothing worth saying.

### **We are all brothers and sisters, like it or not!**

It is easy to recognize "brothers and sisters" who look like us; live like us; and

think like us. Who are our brothers and sisters whom we do not recognize? Do they live in our workplace, community, state? Do our brothers and sisters live in Haiti? Iraq? Korea?

As leaders, who have been given much, more is expected! We are expected to be aware of the impact of our work in the lives of our employees, communities and planet. Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist Zen master, poet and author writes: "It is simply good business to include in our definition of the bottom line a consideration of all the effects we have on one an-



other and on the planet. Businesses that intelligently combine profit making with integrity and concern for the world have happier employees and more satisfied customers while making more money." Today we call this dynamic: Social Responsibility. We are all brothers and sisters, like it or not!

### **Do what needs to be done, because you can. Do it with joy!**

During our weekend retreat, Phra David defined meditation as "awareness that

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is just enough." He suggested that the practice of meditation is just that: practice! It is practice for the real meditation which occurs beyond the quieting. It is awareness that is just enough in everyday living, being fully present in the here and now. It is the awareness of what is going on inside us and what is happening around us.

When we live with that level of presence, we know what needs to be done. It may be offering appreciation for work that has gone unnoticed. It may be taking the time to know the people with

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whom we work, recognizing them as gifted human beings contributing to the mission of our organizations. It may be forgiving someone for harm that he/she has caused, or listening to the pain in the voice of a friend. The invitation is to do what needs to be done, because you can! And...do it with joy!

These leadership lessons are particularly appropriate as we enter into the Season of Light when people around the world celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Al-Hijra, Bodhi and Kwanzaa. My holiday/holy day wish for each of you is to speak from your heart; care for one another; and do what needs to be done, with joy! ■

**Karen Vernal** is the president of Vernal Management Consultants, LLC, a Milwaukee-based leadership and organizational firm dedicated to "igniting the spirit and skills of leaders." The company is one of two firms in the nation to be certified in Emotional Intelligence through the Institute for Health and Human Potential. For additional information, visit [www.vernalmgmt.com](http://www.vernalmgmt.com).