### The Resilience of Mindfulness: From Fear-based Leadership to Courageous Compassion

### By Ron Schultz

Like many of us involved in creating good work that is purposefully of benefit to others, I have spent the last 20 odd years (some of them being very odd) practicing mindfulness. And while this term has gotten a great deal of attention lately with everyone, including the business world, clambering to undertake whatever activity they can to access it, there has always been something missing for me. Not from the practice but from my understanding of the practice.

What I didn’t realize, even though I’m sure it has been said again and again, is that mindfulness equals heartfulness. When I finally heard this expressed, it made perfect sense to me. I get heartfulness. I get being open-hearted and compassionate. I get that it took my practice of mindfulness to lead me back to my heart. Even though I’ve been told there is no separation between mind and heart, I had to live it. Like mindfulness, heartfulness requires courage. The French word for courage essentially means from the heart. And to recognize and act from one’s heartfulness, we must be willing, vulnerable and courageous.

There are so many forces out there, especially in the business world, so terrified of the power of heartfulness that they will do all they can to squash it. For example, those who blanch at using the “L” word in the workplace, believing it something akin to rattling off a string of expletives in church. Or thinking it’s safer to be indifferent to an employee going through a difficult time personally rather than applying a little gentleness and kindness.

It must have been that at some point along their non-courageous path, these folks reasoned you couldn't be ruthless if you were heartful. And they are right. You can’t. As scary as ruthlessness can be, it doesn’t take any courage to act against the interests of others. However, being compassionate for others does. You have to be willing to open your heart, fearlessly welcome others in and not shy away from the feeling. There is nothing wrong in coming from this place and it belongs everywhere. What greater entrepreneurial asset could there be than compassion and courage?

I just attended a weekend-long session called “Being Brave,” that featured Shambhala’s Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Ani Pema Chodren and the Episcopal Bishop of California, Mark Andrus. During the event, the 1,500 assembled were directed into affinity group sessions that encircled the expansive and spacious Craneway Pavilion in Richmond, CA, where the event was held. I was one of the hosts within the Economics and Business affinity area, and it was jammed with folks eager to shift the fear-based and ruthless business world paradigm to one that was more humane and related.

They weren’t waiting for permission. These were entrepreneurs and business people who were doing it already. They felt the heartful connection among their compatriots, but they questioned whether it was possible to shift a business culture so enshrined in what they perceived as greed and aggression.

But, “they” are not the enemy. The courageous perspective is not one of disillusionment, disappointment or frustration with “them.” Like mindfulness, heartfulness is about recognizing that just like me, they are also disillusioned, disappointed and frustrated. Feeling that way toward them creates a gulf that is even greater between us.

Courage is our ability to meet mind-to-mind and heart to heart. The mounting evidence, of course, points to the fact that businesses that recognize this are out-performing their competitors. But that doesn’t stop those who have stuck their heads so deep in the sand they’ve got no room for breath let alone to feel their hearts.

They are afraid, and that fear drives their activities against rather than with. But, we are rapidly discovering, as one ardent eco-climatist pointed out to me, that those against will suffer just as much as those operating with.

If rampaging tornedos and devastating hurricanes don’t scare people into changing, we need a new way to approach this. Fighting fear with more fear is like pouring gas on a fire. This isn’t a time for greater combustion. So what would happen if we used compassion and courage to calm fear instead? It has worked before. The names Gandhi, Mandela, Tutu, Aung San Suu Kyi, and King come to mind for instance. The greatest social transitions made in the past two centuries have all come about when compassion and courage were applied to calm and overcome fear. And yet, we forget.

We love our kittens. We love our puppies. We love our mothers. We love our children. We even love our country. We don’t quite know how to love each other. One would think that the notion of being heartful would transcend religious intransigence. Heartfulness is certainly preached in every religious institution that embraces sacred words. It seems to be the common ground for all of us no matter what we believe.

As people tied by our social interdependence, what keeps us from living that in our workplaces, governments and our relationships with our neighbors? Fear? Mistrust? Differences? The only way we can surmount fear, mistrust and the diversity we don’t understand is with courage. And courage arises from the heart, from our compassion for each other, from our willingness to meet. Truly meet.

That conversation begins between you and me. In having that conversation, together, heart to heart, mind to mind, we can affect the changes we want to see. Ingrained fear does not fall in a day. But ingrained compassion and courage can be both persistent and patient. Being mindful is being heartful. Now, extend that out.