

**Physical Intelligence at Work:  
Servant-Leadership Development for High Performance  
An Introductory Workshop with Wendy Palmer**

Jim Saveland  
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“The first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous.”

Robert K. Greenleaf  
*The Servant as Leader*

“For many years I have told people that although there are a lot of books on leadership, there is only one that serious students have to read—*Servant Leadership* by Robert K. Greenleaf.”

Peter Senge  
Author of *The Fifth Discipline*

“The most important quality of a leader is emptiness, the quality of no ego. We must study deeply, realize the spirit of the samurai, and reinforce control, not over others, but over ourselves.”

Mistsugi Saotome  
*Aikido and the Harmony of Nature*

“Aikido is not for correcting others; it’s for correcting your own mind.”

Morihei Ueshiba  
Founder of Aikido

“This is a whole life training. After a few short years the practices can make a genuine difference. If we take this attitude we can settle back, drop our expectation of instant success and begin to appreciate the small increments of change.”

Wendy Palmer

**Leadership Development and Physical Intelligence**

In October 2000, the RMRS Leadership Team attended a one-day seminar on leadership presented by Stephen Covey (1990). Covey talked about the role of a leader being respecting, integrating and developing body, heart, mind, and spirit. Integrating our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual selves is a popular theme (e.g. Leonard and Murphy 1995, Levey and Levey 1998, Murphy 1992, Wilber 2000). An example is Segal and Horne’s (1997) “Human Dynamics,” a personality assessment system similar to Myers-Briggs, but based on physical, emotional, and mental attributes. Covey also talked about intelligence being associated with body, heart, mind, and spirit. We typically associate intelligence with the mind, our cognitive intelligence. Gardner (1993) postulates there are at least seven kinds of intelligence. In addition to our individual intelligence, Isaacs (1999) discusses access to group intelligence through dialogue. Zohar and Marshall (2001) have recently written about “spiritual intelligence.” In recent years, there has been quite a bit written about intelligence of the heart, so called

“emotional intelligence” (e.g. Goleman 1995, and Weisinger 1998). The skill set of emotional intelligence includes: self-awareness, self-disclosure, self-control, assertiveness, empathy, dynamic listening, zeal and persistence, ability to motivate oneself, give and take criticism, conflict resolution, and team communication and cooperation. The weekend following Covey’s presentation I attended an aikido seminar where Mistsugi Saotome talked about the intelligence of our physical body. Northrup (1998) echoes that thought, “Our entire concept of ‘the mind’ needs to be expanded considerably. The mind can no longer be thought of as being confined to the brain or to the intellect; it exists in every cell of our bodies. Every thought we think has a biochemical equivalent. Every emotion we feel has one as well!” Bryner and Markova (1996) in a book about how the principles of aikido can help build a learning organization (Senge 1990a, 1990b) also talk about a physical intelligence. Physical intelligence includes the embodiment of emotional intelligence skills listed above. Our intuition is our physical intelligence, a wisdom that comes from within. Intuition is an important quality of being when exploring unknown territory or working under stress. Greenleaf (1970) discusses the critical leadership skill of confidently facing the unknown using intuition.

Leonard (1999) describes aikido: “Aikido, the most recent and fastest growing of the major martial arts, is also the most revolutionary.... With ancient samurai roots, it is a radical reform of the samurai tradition, seeking not victory over others but rather, in the founder’s words, ‘the loving protection of all beings.’ Its techniques can cause severe damage or even death, but its heartfelt aim is peace and harmony.... It is ... eminently practical, with nearly endless applications for home, school, and office—for every aspect of our physical, emotional, social, and spiritual life.” Moon (1997) presents aikido as feeling where you are, generating a harmonious relationship, and sharing who you are. Applications of aikido in the work environment include work with Cellular One described in *The Dance of Change* (Senge et. al. 1999, pgs. 149-152). Region 5 has included Tom Crum’s (1987 and 1997) work at past Leadership Improvement Training (LIT) conferences. Heckler (1990) has worked with various groups in the military. O’Neil (1997) has written on the connection between the principles of aikido and the principles of leadership.

Looking at some of the popular literature on leadership, Heifetz (1994) links leadership with doing adaptive work. “A strategy of leadership to accomplish adaptive work accounts for several conditions and values that are consonant with the demands of a democratic society. In addition to reality testing, these include respecting conflict, negotiation, and a diversity of views within a community; increasing community cohesion; developing norms of responsibility-taking, learning, and innovation; and keeping social distress within a bearable range.” Wheatley (1992) talks about the importance of relationships. “We will need to become savvy about how to build relationships, how to nurture growing, evolving things. All of us will need better skills in listening, communicating, and facilitating groups, because these are the talents that build strong relationships. It is well known that the era of the rugged individual has been replaced by the era of the team player. But this is only the beginning. The quantum world has demolished the concept of the unconnected individual. More and more relationships are in store for us, out there in the vast web of universal connections.”

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has developed the following leadership competencies for senior positions in the federal government:

#### Executive Core Qualification 1: Leading Change

Creativity & Innovation	External Awareness	Flexibility	Vision
Continual Learning	Service Motivation	Resilience	

#### Executive Core Qualification 2: Leading People

Conflict Management	Cultural Awareness
Integrity/Honesty	Team Building

#### Executive Core Qualification 3: Results Driven

Customer Service	Decisiveness	Personal Accountability
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#### Executive Core Qualification 5: Building Coalitions/Communication

Influencing/Negotiating	Interpersonal Skills
Partnering	Political Savvy

We have developed a one to two day workshop that is focused on leadership development. Specific techniques and exercises that strengthen a sense of center and build confidence in the power of intuition are provided. The concepts of servant-leadership (Greenleaf 1970) are explored with physical metaphors. The following leadership competencies are addressed:

- Internal & external awareness
- Flexibility - Being open to change and new information; tolerating ambiguity; adapting behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; adjusting rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.
- Resilience - Dealing effectively with pressure (staying relaxed and open); maintaining focus and intensity (center) and remaining persistent, even under adversity; tolerating discomfort and disappointment; recovering quickly from setbacks.
- Service - Displaying a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment to public service; being proactive and achievement-oriented; being self-motivated; pursuing self-development; seeking feedback from others and opportunities to master new knowledge.
- Conflict Management - Resolving conflicts in a positive and constructive manner.

### **High Performance**

My model for producing high levels of performance is heavily influenced by my life long association with sports. I believe one useful model for developing high performance levels can be found in sports psychology (often referred to as mental toughness). The elements of a sports psychology program (see e.g. Martens 1987) include:

- Goal setting
- Positive Self-Talk
- Imagery
- Focus of attention/concentration
- Arousal control (also known as energy management or stress management)
- Feedback
- Practice

Goal setting can be balanced with “holding the space” (Palmer 1994), also known as creating a “container” (Isaacs 1999). Inquiry (Palmer 1994) can be used to go beyond positive self-talk. Palmer (1994) also explores various states of attention, including “dropped,” “open,” and “ellipted.” Relaxation is a large part of arousal control and centering. In sports psychology there is a mind-body connection and integration that is emphasized. In aikido, as in most sports, if you have to think about what you’re doing, it’s too late. That’s where physical intelligence, our intuition, comes in to play.

All of the recent literature on coaching sports that I am aware of emphasizes developing a coaching philosophy based on having fun and developing the player. The American Coaching Effectiveness Program (ACEP) philosophy of “Athletes first, winning second” is an attempt to verbalize a ranking of the importance of winning and development.

In summary, my intention is to develop a workshop that focuses on personal growth and development of servant leadership skills by embodying some of the principles from aikido. Development of leadership skills is important for everyone, not just those in formal leadership positions. Leadership development is also not a one-shot deal, but a life-long process of continual improvement. At the same time, I expect we will have fun doing it together and that there will be some skills gained that contribute to high performance for us as individuals and as part of a group. By going through the experience together in a group we will work on increasing community cohesion and strengthening relationships.

We will work with Wendy Palmer. Wendy has been practicing aikido for some 30 years and is a 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt. She co-founded Aikido of Tamalpais with George Leonard and Richard Heckler. She currently teaches aikido there. She has also developed a program called Conscious Embodiment using aikido principles as a way of studying boundaries and deepening relationships; and worked with Kaiser Permanente in bringing the principles of aikido into the workplace. She also directs the Prison Integrated Health Program, a volunteer project which provides classes in behavioral medicine at the Federal Correctional Institution in Dublin, CA.

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