

Transpersonal Leadership Series: *White Paper Nine*

# Politics Beyond the Ego

Ethical Political Leadership for the 21st Century

DUNCAN ENRIGHT



# Transpersonal Leadership

Routledge and LeaderShape Global in partnership are pleased to announce a series of quarterly White Papers around the subject of Transpersonal Leadership, all connected to the book entitled "*Leading Beyond The Ego: How to Become a Transpersonal Leader*" which was published in March 2018.

So what is Transpersonal Leadership? The concept was first published in a report on tomorrow's leadership based on a leadership development journey developed by LeaderShape (Knights, 2011). The word "transpersonal" was inspired by the use of the word in "transpersonal psychology" (Bynum, 2010). "Transpersonal" is defined as "Extending or going beyond the personal or individual, beyond the usual limits of ego and personality".

The complete definition of a **Transpersonal Leader** is:

They operate beyond the ego while continuing personal development and learning.

They are radical, ethical, and authentic while emotionally intelligent and caring.

They are able to:

- embed authentic, ethical and emotionally intelligent behaviours into the DNA of the organisation
- build strong, collaborative relationships, and
- create a Performance Enhancing Culture that is Ethical, Caring and Sustainable



**LeaderShape Global** is a UK headquartered organisation with a global culture that operates without borders. It exists to develop people around the world who can lead beyond their ego to be radical, ethical and authentic, i.e. Transpersonal Leaders. It provides work-based learning through a faculty of senior executives who are accredited coaches and experienced facilitators, blended with online content and web-based tools. [www.leadershapeglobal.com](http://www.leadershapeglobal.com)

Get involved in developing the conversation around Transpersonal Leadership, join the LinkedIn Group "Transpersonal Leadership – Leading beyond the Ego" at [www.linkedin.com/groups/8257117](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/8257117)

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# Politics Beyond the Ego

## Ethical Political Leadership for the 21st Century

By *Duncan Enright*

**This is our ninth White Paper, entitled 'Politics Beyond the Ego: Ethical Political Leadership for the 21st Century' written by Duncan Enright.**

This paper, which argues that political leaders need to develop themselves and become transpersonal leaders for the sake of our planet, follows these eight popular white papers:

- Ethical Leadership: How to Develop Ethical Leaders
- Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century
- Sustainable Leadership; Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success
- Leading Across Cultures: Developing Leaders for Global Organisations
- Leadership in India: A Need to Keep Pace with India's Growth Story?
- Leadership in China: Harnessing Chinese Wisdom for Global Leadership?
- Adult Development: its Role in the Leadership Journey
- Digital Transformation: Creating a Digital-first Culture through Transpersonal Leadership

### Summary

A Transpersonal Leader operates beyond the ego, generating followers, walking alongside them on a journey they would not otherwise embark upon, and develops the leaders of the future. Leaders need vision of a brighter future. They need to be able to communicate that vision and inspire others to join them in building that future – including, for politicians and leaders of democratic organisations such as co-operatives, winning electoral support. They take account of the many different stakeholders, maintaining a strong ethical framework for decisions and behaviour, creating a climate in which everyone can succeed and grow, and promoting a culture of respect, equality and liberating talent, harnessing diversity through inclusion.

Through focussing on the needs of the people they serve, employing and developing empathy in themselves and others, they may not always meet success but they will always offer positive, ethical, effective government. Many inspiring leaders fail to recognise the need to grow new leaders, and their vision is lost. It is essential therefore that they need to inspire and work actively to develop others, to take on the leadership role when they have moved on.

Importantly, political leaders need to adhere to a strong ethical core – to hold values close and remain true to them, make them explicit and invite others to share them, and measure decisions against these values. This combination of highly skilled leadership, empathy and emotional intelligence, focus on the needs of others, and a firm ethical base, is called "Transpersonal Leadership".

**Duncan Enright** is a director and faculty member of LeaderShape Global engaged in developing transpersonal leaders. He has also spent over 40 years in active politics, in elected and appointed positions, including over a decade as an elected councillor on County, District and Town Councils, ten years as a non-executive director in the UK National Health Service including eight years as Vice Chair and a spell as interim Chair, and ten years on the UK Governing Party's policy making body as a Policy Commissioner. He has been chosen for several high-profile candidacies and has fought important election campaigns, including as a candidate in a by-election and General Elections standing against the UK Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

Alongside his political career, Duncan has spent over thirty years developing publishing programmes to support professional development, and in the last few years has led work across the world to promote evidence-based knowledge solutions at the point of decision for doctors, pharmacists and nurses. This included leading the British National Formulary and creating a multi-award winning reference series at specialist publisher Evidence-based Networks Ltd. Duncan is an experienced leader, coach and trainer

See his full bio here:

<http://leadershapeglobal.com/duncan-enright>

Transpersonal leaders are needed more than ever in this time of great change and challenge, not least to the future of our planet. Every political leader can learn to lead beyond the ego, in the best interests of good government, unlocking the power of liberal<sup>1</sup> democracy, facing the future with confidence, and building a world in which everyone can hope to prosper.

## Introduction

The great Roman orator, writer, advocate and politician Cicero was one of the first to articulate the principles of politics as we know them today. He described the universality of a law based on nature, including human nature – an inextinguishable and inalienable set of principles that match reason with nature, and transcends identity to bind all human beings together. He also described the notion of natural equality, based not on opinion, argument or reason but on the nature of humanity: we are all born for justice, we all possess reason and capacity for experience, we all understand the difference between good and bad. Cicero goes on to describe the State as a natural progression from the human need for social interaction. And of course, such States need conscious “government” – states belong to the people, are created by them to meet their needs, and exist for the common good. The term “Commonwealth” is coined to encapsulate such a concept (Cicero, 51 BCE). Few governments or politicians would deny these fundamental elements and goals of government.

Our world is governed by institutions, parliaments and senates, all different in the way they work.

The concept of “liberal<sup>1</sup> democracy” is the system by which most of the Western World has been governed for much of the last century. Liberal<sup>1</sup> democracy is a system under which universal suffrage is used to elect our leaders, who are constrained to respect individual rights and the rights of minorities, and are subject to the rule of law and other democratic checks and balances. This system has various advantages over other forms of government; one is the tendency to encourage the emergence of leaders who have the wider public interest at heart, and who in any case are constrained to exercise power in the public interest. However, this paper will not differentiate by the nature, form, mode of election or statutory powers of government. Instead it will look at a common feature of them all – they are populated and led by politicians, who are inspired to serve in the work of government, chosen from and by others by means of election or other method of selection, and in whose hands responsibility is placed for the wider good. These politicians are also human, fallible, sometimes inspired, exposed, accountable, and scrutinised.

Politicians are all leaders. They are chosen to be so. The parish councillor in a voluntary and part-time post representing their neighbours, every bit as much as the President of a large country or multinational parliament, has the same responsibility to govern, with consent, on behalf of the people they serve. Alongside their colleagues, they should provide a sense of purpose and destiny for their community. They should play a part in setting the climate and culture of their society. They should work with others, often in a political party, to argue for their values to win through in government. Theirs is not just to keep a steady state, but to pursue a vision of a better world, or at least their bit of it. Politicians should offer vision, inspiration, and take people to a better place they wouldn't otherwise have reached.



### Note

<sup>1</sup> The word “liberal” when applied to politics is interpreted differently in the USA than Europe, including the UK. Here we are using the European definition of “a form of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of liberalism, i.e. protecting the rights of the individual, which are generally enshrined in law”. Conservatism in the USA commonly refers to a combination of economic “liberalism” and “libertarianism”, and social conservatism. Its political philosophy advocates only minimal state intervention in the lives of citizens, while promoting more traditional values on social issues.

It is often said that “all political lives end in failure” (Powell, 1977). It is less noted that by no means all politicians experience success! It is of no value to merely reflect on the career of politicians to seek out more successful ones, and think that success alone is a measure of excellence in political leadership. A lucky politician may never experience the sort of world events and challenges that less lucky but more talented leaders are defeated. Instead the traits and leadership skills in politics can be derived from the purpose of politics, and found in the stated preference of the people who put them in a position of power and on whose behalf they serve.

## What do people want from their political leaders?

The following passage was written with corporate leaders in mind, by Greg Young, CEO of LeaderShape. I have taken the liberty of rewriting it in the context of our world and its political leaders. It expresses really well why we need our politicians to be transpersonal – to lead beyond the ego.

“Imagine you live in a world with a clear sense of purpose that you and your neighbours shared, and that sense of purpose was ethical, authentic and caring whilst also being sustainably successful; taking care not only of a gilded elite, but all citizens. Imagine too, if that sense of purpose and environment allowed world governments to be so nimble and collaborative that they were able to respond to world challenges such as climate change, technological advancement, inequality and natural disaster with successful and radical solutions. An environment where input, initiative and innovation are encouraged; people valued, listened to and cared about with strong relationships between citizens and political colleagues, and civil servants of government highly skilled and trusted to get on with things. Wouldn't that be a place you would want to live?”

So often we hear of governments and societies where knowledge is power, where there is a lack of engagement, brought about by politicians relying on carrot and stick methods to force through their agenda, and where politicians often have, for any variety of reasons, their own interests at the forefront of their minds. In addition to re-election and security of tenure, those reasons could include the desire for power, prestige, recognition or reward.

To live in a world that is a great place, like the one described above, it needs to be led by exceptional people. They have become exceptional not only because they are demonstrably great leaders but because they have developed a level of self-awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. They have also brought into full consciousness who they are in terms of values, ethics and beliefs and they know what they want to do with who they are; their motivation, courage, resilience and aspiration. They know their purpose, and they don't let self-interest get in the way. They are leading beyond the ego (Knights et al, 2018).

The news channels and social media are increasingly full of instances where countries are divided, public policy is seen as unethical or uncaring, or they have failed to adapt to a change in context, environmental or societal challenges, or disruptive technology. These might sound quite different things, but at their centre is the political climate set by the top leaders. Their egos are getting in the way, driven either by placing personal reward over ethics, perhaps by the size of their personal fortune or overweening interests, or the fear that being radical will place their own position, power or interests under threat. This is so often echoed throughout a country, mirroring the behaviour of those at the top.

There's a term for a person who acts beyond their ego, it's called being "Transpersonal". Transpersonal leaders have developed the emotional intelligence to lead in ways that mean people follow them, there is empathy, trust and inspiration; all the things that equip someone to be an effective leader. When you have followers, you can afford to be radical in the knowledge that people will stay with you with a shared sense of values and purpose, understanding that you are making decisions in the interests of the greater good. That way countries can thrive in the long term, building a sustainable future, builds trust with its citizens, civil servants, businesses and communities, and other countries and leaders. That's the world I want to live in.

## Case Study: What Canadians Look For

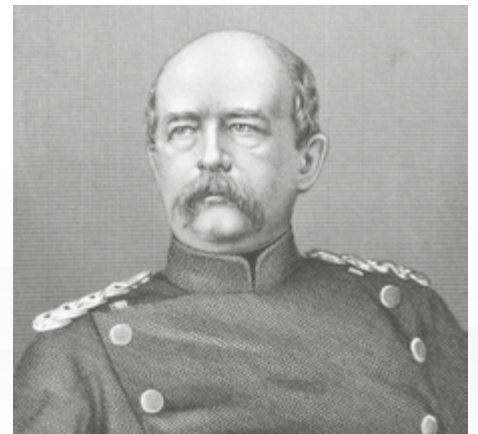
The election of Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2015 led to a search for new leaders in the other two main parties. Research and strategy firm Abacus conducted research into what qualities people look for in a political leader. The outcome was surprising: rather than strength or intellect, more of the "must have" attributes spoke about behaviours and attitudes, including: "think a lot about the future of the world", "ask for help when you need it", and "apologize when you make a mistake" (Anderson and Coletto, 2016).

## Vision – the essential ingredient

"Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best", said Otto von Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor" of Germany. Yet his legacy, a united Germany with a fresh shared identity, speaks of his visionary approach more than his pragmatic words (though it takes both to govern).

Why is vision so important for politicians? There are certainly dangers in judging our leaders based on their vision without scrutiny or expert questioning, as many historic examples of malignant populist visionaries (Hitler, Mussolini) have illustrated, though during election proper process such as public debate, media scrutiny and effective opposition can limit this. Dror (1988) proposes some counter measures to raw populism.

Politicians need to lay out a programme before those they hope to govern. A visionary style of leadership offers optimism, inspiration, and displays the sort of self-confidence necessary in government. As in any enterprise, a distinction is sometimes made between managerial and visionary styles of political leadership (Molchanov, Knight



and Masciulli, 2016). A managerial approach to government may be a statement of intent, such as the pledge to pursue “strong and stable” government (as Theresa May of the Conservatives did rather unsuccessfully in the 2017 UK General Election). It is not sufficient to be a vision, as it has no destination or inspiring direction, and merely describes an inward-looking and process-driven approach – a reductive managerial style of leadership is described. Politicians do not just inspire to get elected or chosen, but rather to provide a clear picture of the future, generate followers, win over citizens and generate momentum towards a common goal.

No successful government can carry on without direction, and that means political leaders should not only have a vision, but be skilled in leading with a visionary style. That means not only having an inspiring vision, but leading people towards a shared vision that everyone has bought into and owns. A visionary style can be highly positive, and offers clear direction. It requires self-confidence (and self-awareness), transparency and strong relationship management (Knights et al. 2018, p.81).

In the poll mentioned above of Canadians after an election in 2015, citizens were asked what they valued in political leaders. The top answers, “Think about what’s right for the next generation” and “Understand different parts of the world” indicate a high value placed on visionary leadership (Anderson and Coletto, 2016).

## Case Study: Uniting Europe after War

Extraordinary times encourage imaginative, visionary leaders to promote new ideas that may shape cultural and national identities. Existing identities and histories will necessarily limit the extent to which a new vision can change perceptions – any new vision must resonate with existing opinion. In the same way, a consensus within political groupings based on existing interests around a new vision is a condition of its success. However, at critical junctures visionary political leadership can shift public opinion and sense of identity permanently (Marcussen et al., 1999). Such a moment occurred in Europe at the end of the Second World War and has shaped our world since.

Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of West Germany from 1949 to 1963, espoused the dream of “the great work of fostering durable international reconciliation and a community of nations for the good of Europe” when Mayor of Cologne in 1919, in the wake of the first terrible war of the twentieth century (Buchstab and Schreiner, 2007). Charles De Gaulle, President of France during the formation of a new national identity, allied his vision of a France rebuilt with one of a strong economic and political alliance within Europe, with an outlook tempered by prevailing French notions of nationhood and identity (Moravcsik, 2000). As UK Prime Minister in 1942, Winston Churchill looked forward to “a United States of Europe, in which the barriers between the nations will be greatly minimized and unrestricted travel will be possible” (Ramiro Troitiño, Kerikmäe and Chochia, 2018).

Clearly the coincidence of opportunity, through the need to rebuild and the rejection of open conflict in Europe, coupled with a clear view of national identity and a measure of political consensus, led talented and far-sighted visionary leaders to take a step towards a future that was imagined and then negotiated through decades that followed.



## Case Study: Unification of Germany after the Cold War (1990)

Many obstacles stood in the way of the reunification of the Federal and Democratic Republics of Germany (known as West and East Germany respectively) but the collapse of the “Iron Curtain” dividing Europe from 1945 until the late 1980s created a pivot around which the future of the country, divided at the end of the Second World War, could change. However the political leaders of the time knew they had to act in a concerted manner to resolve the many complexities including unfinished settlement of power in Europe to unite Germany once again. This took extraordinary political and diplomatic skill, and will (Kaiser, 1990). However, it also took visionary political leadership – the ability to articulate a clear picture of the future by Chancellor Kohl of West Germany, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, American President George Bush Sr, and French President Francois Mitterand, among others, and to pursue that vision by harnessing the enthusiasm and talents of many others worldwide.

## Democratic Style of Leadership

To be clear, when referring to a “democratic style” of leadership, this does not mean the process of fighting and winning elections through one person, one vote. The democratic style is one that builds engagement and buy-in, through encouraging input and ideas from others (Knights et al, 2018). No politician operates in isolation. Political leaders must energise a team of civil servants, coordinate a team of ministers within the government, maintain support from a political party, and encourage great thoughts and insights from wider society.

The democratic style of leadership is potent when working with specialists and high-knowledge colleagues. The commitment generated among such colleagues is essential to good government. If a politician thinks they have all the answers, that is a certain sign that they do not. In a complex world where delivery depends on the expertise of others, a leader using this style will maximise the information on which decisions are made, and get people committed to a successful outcome. It is not about abdicating responsibility, but it involves listening skills and skilful relationship management.

The democratic style has a particularly positive impact on the culture of government, and in supporting the visionary style. Together evidence shows that these two leadership styles – visionary and democratic – engender an achievement-oriented culture that drives innovation and success (Ogbonna and Harris, 2000).

Many commentators connect the problems of reaching an agreement on Brexit to the lack of cross-party discussions in the UK, at least until the very last moment, whereas the countries of Europe reached a consensus on their approach very early in the negotiations.



## Case Study: The UK Labour Party National Policy Forum and democratic inclusion

In 1990 the UK Labour Party established a multi-stakeholder forum to deliberate over policy and take responsibility for the formulation of a manifesto for the forthcoming general election. For the next 25 years, this forum played an important role in allowing elected representatives of the grass roots of the party, along with affiliate organisations such as the Cooperative Party and Trade Unions, to debate key policy issues with MPs, MEPs and Government Ministers including the Prime Ministers or party leaders. The Forum was therefore a group characterised by diversity: including diversity of class, background, gender, geography (delegates were elected by region), political opinion (from all shades of the Labour Party from left to centre) and constituency.

Shortcomings were clear, such as complex relationships with other sources of grass-roots authority such as the annual conference, inability to react quickly enough to debate and influence events as they happened (such as foreign policy issues, notably the Iraq War), limited access to expertise in complex areas, clunky communication mechanisms for much of its existence, and limited coverage of local or multinational policy (Hertner, 2015). However, the National Policy Forum led to a remarkable expansion of policy debate including at regional and local events led by Forum delegates. This improved the sense of party member engagement up to a point, led to coherent programme and policy coverage (rather than atomised “motions” or “resolutions”, brought forward new ideas from outside Parliament, and influenced leadership positions on issues from healthcare policy to climate change. Most importantly, for much of its time it gave leaders a rich source of (largely positive) insight and opinion.

## Inspiring leadership through empathy

Empathy is by far the emotional intelligence capability that is most commonly in need of development, with 62% of all leaders requiring work on their skills (Knights et al, 2018). Inspiring through empathy - the ability to read and react to situations correctly by making the effort to listen to and really understand others – is recognised in many fields as an essential leadership skill (Kail, 2011).

It has been argued (Clohesy, 2013) that “the relationship between empathy and politics can and should be understood in the context of reciprocity or as elements within a virtuous circle. . . because empathy provides us with a sense of our duties to others, it allows us to see politics as something that is enabling, necessary, noble and ethical!”

In politics, empathy is highly visible and hugely prized in our leaders. On the death of Nelson Mandela, his friend Desmond Tutu wrote of his “incredible empathy” which allowed him to understand the perspectives of former foes as well as difficult allies, and forge the rainbow nation of South Africa out of the post-apartheid confusion (Tutu, 2013).



## Case Study: Lincoln's Empathy Saves The Union

Republican American President Abraham Lincoln was well known as a moral and sometimes stubborn or sorrowful character. However many commentators at the time and since have commented on his empathy (Pruyn, 2005). He brought together a disparate team of talented and ambitious colleagues to operate effectively as a team, through understanding what motivated them. He was able to predict the actions of his political opponents, thus planning his own actions to counter them. Thus when called upon to unite a country riven by civil war, his ability to find more in common was a vital tool in binding the United States together again. His famous quote: "Those who look for the bad in people will surely find it" illustrates well his open mind and heart, and another: "I don't like that man. I must get to know him better" shows his belief in the value of empathy to bridge divides.



## Case Study: Jacinda Ardern and The Politics of Empathy

In a contribution to a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2019, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern talked of a new politics focussed on empathy, kindness and wellbeing (Ardern, 2019). She argued that economic measures alone cannot meet the needs of people, communities and society. Instead government interventions are to look at the gap between economic success measures, and wider measures of what success might include. By looking at the actual lived experience of citizens, rather than traditional economic measures, the hope is that engagement and trust will return to institutions, over the next 20 years or more, and longer term challenges such as climate change and inequality can be addressed.

Ardern is not the only politician to have made wider measures of governmental success important. Indeed UK Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said in 1998 that "Improving the quality of life for people of this country is perhaps the most important duty of Government." However Ardern is one of the first to couch the goals in terms of empathy.

## Developing new leaders

For any leader, the ability to develop new leaders by inspiring, encouraging and providing a role model is an important capability, and one of the core capabilities within relationship management. A true test of a great political leader is the extent to which their work lives on after them through those they have inspired and developed.

Alexis de Tocqueville's examination of democracy in America (de Tocqueville, 2002) shows how an engaged civil society, with many interlocking elements, introduces checks and balances to

politics and governance. These do not only restrict demagogues, but also tend to provide a ready supply of active politicians ready to challenge and develop - both as opposition and as successors to any leader. To this extent a controversial leader might encourage many others to take up the challenge to lead in their stead. However, politicians who encourage the development of civil society deserve great credit for their role in bolstering talented political leadership in future generations.

Notable contributions come from former political leaders such as US President Clinton, whose Foundation "is committed to cultivating a diverse, new generation of leaders" including "a historic partnership between the presidential libraries of President Clinton, President George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush, and Lyndon B. Johnson to cultivate promising leaders from the business, academic, public service, non-profit, and military sectors as they seek to create positive change on the issues confronting their communities."

## Case Study: Next Generation Leaders for the Republic of Kazakhstan

The emergence of new countries in the turbulence of the end of the Cold War provide a range of different examples of the development of civil society. One notable such example is the Bolashak Scholarship programme created in the newly formed Republic of Kazakhstan. Bolashak is the Kazakh word for "future". Though some studies have found it hard to pin down the absolute value of the programme (Perna, Orosz and Jumakulov, 2015), it has sponsored almost 12,000 students to study in a range of international universities including in the UK, USA, China and Russia (JSC Center for International Programs, 2019). Feedback from employers and government, who employ the graduates after their studies for a minimum of five years, is highly positive, with one employer describing the scholars as: "the next generation of leaders of the country" (Perna, Orosz and Jumakulov, 2015). Alongside this development has been the building of a new (and first international) university in the capital Astana, named by the parliament after the first President Nazarbayev, its sponsor and the driving force of the Bolashak program.

## Promote diversity

Diverse governments are effective governments. A government that shares the diverse background and interests of the people it governs is by its nature better matched to the task.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019) reports a range of benefits, for example, seen when women play a major part in government: "An increase of women in public life results in lower levels of inequality and increased confidence in national governments. Figures show that the increased presence of women cabinet ministers is associated with a rise in public health spending across many countries.

Ensuring that governments reflect the diversity of the societies they represent guarantees a balanced perspective which enables an inclusive approach to policy making and service delivery."

Transpersonal leaders reach across the whole population, and make use of the greater insights available through using diversity and inclusion in government, including minority opinions and groups. This does not mean blowing with the wind, but it does lead to a stronger government with greater capacity and clearer insights.

It is very important for political leaders to listen to opposing views, and not surround themselves by those who share their own opinions. Diversity in political leadership groups offers political leaders the opportunity to test ideas, understand objections, and remain flexible in their thinking. The value, for example, of a “loyal opposition” – an agreed formal role for the principle party not of government enshrined in either rights or constitution (Waldron, 2012) - in democratic countries is to provide an explicit source of challenge and debate.

Diversity exists within political parties, as well as between them. This is noted explicitly in countries that elect their governments by proportional representation, where coalition is the norm, and citizens judge parties by competence (in particular in the economic sphere) (Anderson, 1995) and expect diverse interests to be managed well; citizens find interests represented in more than one party.

## Case Study: British Government, Coalition, Brexit and Diverse Opinions

British Prime Minister Theresa May was unable in January 2019 to avoid a massive parliamentary defeat, the largest by a British Government in modern history, for her plan for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. Many commentators laid blame at the way she kept the negotiations and planning close to her inner team, lacking the diversity of views and support to be won by involving a wider group, perhaps including opposition MPs, in her discussions (Jenkins, 2019).

In contrast, when faced with minority government in 2010, her predecessor as Prime Minister, David Cameron, reached out to the third party in British politics, the Liberal Democrats, to form a largely stable coalition government that held power for five years. Contrary to expectation, the coalition survived despite following a highly controversial “austerity” economic policy (Atkins, 2015). The coincidence of interests and diversity of ministers in government delivered solid support, so that despite the collapse in support for the minority partner, the two parties polled 45% of the vote in the 2015 election leading to an unexpected majority for David Cameron’s Conservatives.

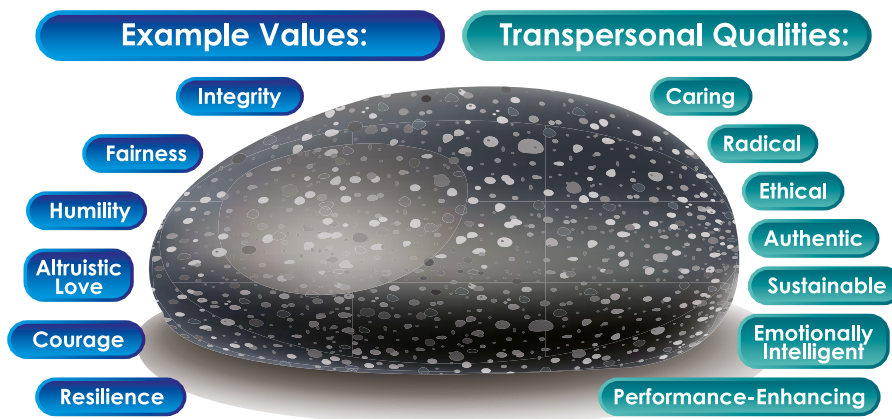
## Ethical touchstone

For a transpersonal political leader, the choices they make reflect our whole person – choices make us who we are. John Knights gives a fuller discussion of the importance of bringing our whole selves into the choices we make, in a ground-breaking paper in this series on developing ethical leaders (Knights, 2016): “We can define Ethical Leadership as the process of influencing people to act through principles and values and beliefs that embrace what we have defined as ethical behaviour”.

How then do we make choices consistently for the greater good? How do we define what ethical behaviour means for us? Our decisions are the result of the choices we make, and those choices are determined by our perception of the situation, but also by our principles, values and beliefs. In order to make a choice in a way which is free of ego, radical, authentic, ethical, caring, sustainable, emotionally intelligent and performance enhancing, in the interest of those we serve and in full knowledge of those it will impact, we need to bring our full consciousness to bear on decisions. One way to do that is to create a personal touchstone we refer to whenever we make a choice (Knights et al, 2018).

A personal ethical touchstone should include core personal values – those virtues we regard as most important to us. See the example below. The values might instead include honesty and trustworthiness, or maybe patience and forgiveness. Alongside these we refer to transpersonal qualities: caring, radical, ethical, authentic, sustainable, emotionally intelligent and performance-enhancing (Knights et al, 2018).

### Example Touchstone



On the night before he died, Leader of the UK Labour Party John Smith gave a speech in which he said: “The opportunity to serve our country – that is all we ask” (Links - Dialogue, Action, Research, 2014). This admirable statement says a lot about the ethical touchstone of John Smith. What is your touchstone?

## Resilience

In his work *The Presidential Character*, James Barber proposes “character, style and world view” as ways to assess the suitability of someone to hold the office of President of the United States (Barber, 2017). He describes four character types: active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive and passive-negative. His view, supported by a rudimentary but effective exploration of those who have held the office of President, indicates that active-positive people do best in the role. The notion of positivity affects very strongly a President’s ability, as noted by Barber, to display resilience in the role of leadership, and also lends optimism, along with a focus on the future which is much needed to sustain political leadership.

Resilience relies on strong emotional intelligence, and involves a number of interlocking capabilities and values, such as achievement orientation, self-confidence, adaptability and empathy. It also requires the strong ethical core providing integrity and courage, among other values. It also demands self-knowledge and a measure of introspection.

### Transpersonal Resilience



In his treatise “The Leadership Mystique” Kets de Vries describes two sides of “narcissism” – which he describes as constructive and reactive. Politicians are usually driven, confident people who might display elements of these traits. The first, constructive narcissism (or a strong sense of self) he illustrates with positive examples of successful leaders and entrepreneurs. Clearly a strong sense of self is highly desirable for leaders – to remain firmly connected to an ethical touchstone and to be resilient in the face of major challenges.

The latter form, reactive narcissism, is not conducive to good leadership at all; the results of that are described as follows (Kets de Vries, 2006):

“True reactive narcissists tend to have a grandiose sense of self-importance. They habitually take advantage of others in order to achieve their own ends. They also live under the illusion that their problems are unique. Then there is a sense of entitlement, the feeling that they deserve especially favourable treatment and that the rules set for others do not apply to them. Furthermore, they are addicted to compliments – they can never get enough. They lack empathy, being unable to experience how others feel. Last, but certainly not least, their envy of others, and their rage when prevented from getting their own way, can be formidable (Kernberg, 1975).”

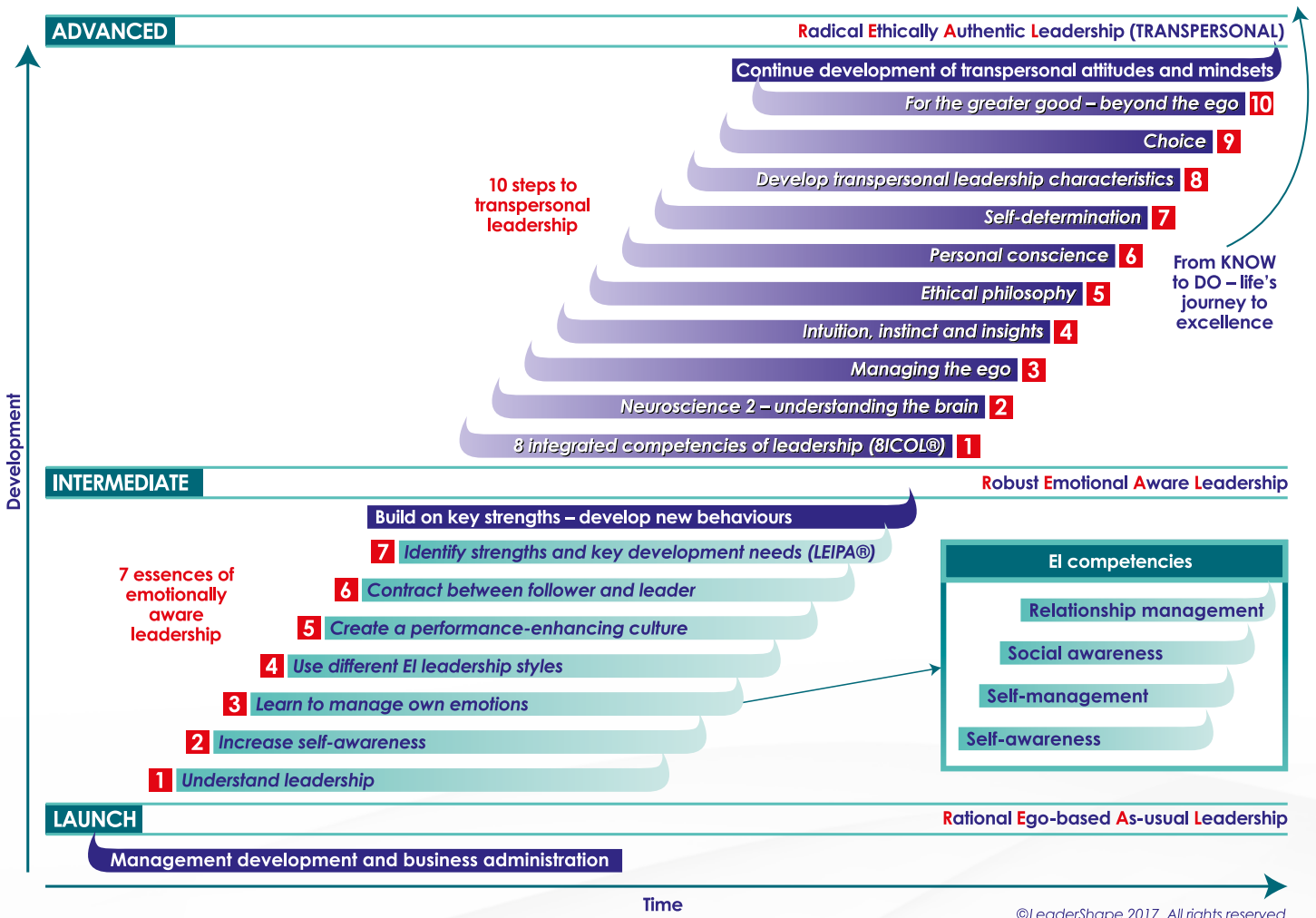
Does that sound like any politicians you know? Does their resilience reflect self-knowledge or something else? Would you describe them as successful political leaders?

# Conclusion

In our complex world, we seek political leaders who are prepared to lead in a way that is radical, ethical and authentic – who go beyond their ego to inspire with vision, reach out to others to share power in a democratic style, who show empathy, who develop new leaders to succeed them, who value and encourage diversity, and who have an ethical touchstone visible through the choices they make and the decisions that flow from those choices. They need to be resilient, but not by shutting out all other voices, instead through being highly emotionally intelligent.

In short, we require political leaders who lead beyond the ego: transpersonal leaders. The development journey to transpersonal leadership is not a straight line, nor is it ever completed (Knights et al, 2018). However for the sake of each other, and for the planet, this is the journey we need our politicians to follow.

## REAL Transpersonal leadership development journey to excellence



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