

Verizon Visiting Professorship in Business Ethics

Dignity, Wisdom, and Tomorrow's Ethical Business Leaders

Donna Hicks

Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs,
Harvard University

Sandra Waddock

Galligan Chair of Strategy, Carroll School Scholar of Corporate
Responsibility, and Professor of Management, Boston College

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UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Business Ethics**



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THE CENTER FOR BUSINESS ETHICS at Bentley University is a nonprofit educational and consulting organization whose vision is a world in which all businesses contribute positively to society through their ethically sound and responsible operations. The center's mission is to provide leadership in the creation of organizational cultures that align effective business performance with ethical business conduct. It endeavors to do so by applying expertise, research and education and taking a collaborative approach to disseminating best practices. With a vast network of practitioners and scholars and an extensive multimedia library, the center offers an international forum for benchmarking and research in business ethics.

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W. Michael Hoffman, PhD

Executive Director
Center for Business Ethics and
Hieken Professor of Business
and Professional Ethics
Bentley University

It could be said that the Achilles Heel of academia is our laser-like focus on the details of our field. This tends to result in an intellectual myopia, preventing us from seeing beyond the ever narrowing “silos” of our specialization. Every now and then, however, someone comes along and says, “Stop! Let’s come back to earth and focus on the essentials.” In this case, two distinguished scholars, Donna Hicks of Harvard and Sandra Waddock of Boston College, joined forces to do just that by reminding us to focus on two of the most essential ideas underlying the field of business ethics, wisdom, and dignity.

This lecture came at an auspicious moment as the Center for Business Ethics was announcing that in 2016, it will celebrate its 40th anniversary. As we reflect back on four decades of advancing business ethics, the time is also fitting that through this lecture, we get back to our roots and recall what business ethics is at its essence. It was not long ago that the word “ethics” was seen as unrelated to the word “business,” and in that “disconnect,” the door was opened wide to all sorts of corruption. Two other words that also are not often associated with business, but should be, are “wisdom” and “dignity.” When we fail to see the vital role of wisdom and dignity in the conduct of business, the result is an impoverished understanding of business. If forty years of relentless study of business ethics has shown us anything, it is that when one narrows one’s view of business as a simple pursuit of profits, corruption and danger follow as surely as night follows day. By contrast, when business is infused with ideas that honor humanity, such as wisdom and dignity, the capacity of business to contribute to social flourishing is colossal and a testimony to human genius.

Drs. Hicks and Waddock have done us a service by reminding us that in pursuing business ethics we are affirming something deep and noble that can and should be a part of doing business. As we at the Center celebrate our four decades of work, it is refreshing and humbling to return to the core values of wisdom and dignity that are foundational to the ethical conduct of business.

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Sandra Waddock (standing) and Donna Hicks, delivering the Verizon Lecture in Business Ethics to students, faculty, staff, and friends at Bentley University.



Donna Hicks

Associate at the Weatherhead Center
for International Affairs
Harvard University

DONNA HICKS is an Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. She has 20 years of experience as a facilitator during international conflicts in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Cuba, Northern Ireland, and the US. As a co-host with Archbishop Desmond Tutu on the BBC show “Facing the Truth,” Donna was a key member of a three-part television series which brought victims and perpetrators of the Northern Ireland conflict together to find resolution. Donna is the author of the book, *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict* (Yale).



Sandra Waddock

Galligan Chair of Strategy
Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility
and Professor of Management
Boston College

SANDRA WADDOCK is Galligan Chair of Strategy, Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility, and Professor of Management at Boston College’s Carroll School of Management. Waddock has published eleven books and more than 100 papers on topics related to corporate responsibility, multi-sector collaboration, and management education. She has received numerous awards for her work, including the 2005 Aspen Faculty Pioneer Award for External Impact and 215 Cross Sector Social Interaction Lifetime Achievement Award. Her latest book is *Intellectual Shamans* (Cambridge, 2015), which was preceded by *Building the Responsible Enterprise* (with Andreas Rasche) in 2012.



(From left) Greg Miles, Director, Office of Ethics & Business Conduct, Verizon Communications, W. Michael Hoffman, PhD, founding executive director of the Center for Business Ethics and Hieken Professor of Business and Professional Ethics at Bentley, Sandra Waddock, Galligan Chair of Strategy, Carroll School Scholar of Corporate Responsibility, and Professor of Management, Boston College, Donna Hicks, Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, and Paul McGovern, Manager of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity Employment at Verizon Communications.

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U*buntu*, the African cultural idea that “I am because we are” is central to understanding what it means to be human in many cultures. This concept inherently recognizes the importance of the whole community and our relationships to each other, as well as the individual. The idea of *ubuntu* is also a key to understanding both wisdom and dignity as core aspects of what it means to be an ethical leader today in business and, importantly, tomorrow, whether that leadership takes place in a business or some other context. We live in a world fraught with ecological and social problems, political systems that are out of whack with democratic imperatives, organizations that demean and dehumanize many of their employees, and an economic perspective that places material wealth and financial interests over social, ecological, and human interests. Such a system devalues what it means to be human, compromising the inherent dignity and worth of people

who are not at the top, not to mention devaluing the worth of non-human living beings, including the Earth itself, viewed as the living system Gaia (see Lovelock, 2000).

This world cries out for wise and ethical leadership, leadership that recognizes and honors the dignity of all living beings and particularly humans, and makes decisions, including or perhaps especially in business, in the interest of the whole, including the planet and its ability to support human civilization. Wise leaders recognize the reality that our planet is small and fragile enough that the “we” of Ubuntu, that is, all of us wherever we are situated, need to work together if needed changes are to be made. Necessary changes require first of all wisdom and, importantly, that others within the system be treated with the dignity that all humans and other living beings deserve as a birthright, along with the courage to act in the face of established interests and pressures for business as usual. As with Ubuntu, we focus on ancient as well as modern traditions, in particular, the idea of



Wisdom comes from seeing the whole, the implications of decisions, and the worth of others, including the earth.

the wise leader as shaman, to resurrect an ancient paradigm and bring forward much-needed healing in all of our communities.

There is a sense in which wise leaders undertake the role of the shaman. Shamans are the medicine men and women in traditional cultures. Shamans in both traditional cultures and today are healers, connectors, and sensemakers (Waddock, 2015; Egri & Frost, 1994; Frost & Egri, 1994), attributes that we believe are necessary to ethical leadership. That is, they work to heal individuals, communities, and in today's leadership capacities, societies, and even the planet as a whole. As connectors, they cross boundaries of a variety of kinds. For traditional shamans, that boundary-crossing is into spiritual realms, where they gather information to bring back and heal what is wrong with the patient, often by focusing on healing the mythology that is deeply embedded in their communities. Modern shamans—whether intellectual shamans (Waddock, 2015) or shamans as leaders and wise elders—do this by

crossing a variety of boundaries, as well, often disciplinary or functional boundaries within their enterprises, or sector boundaries, because they understand the worth and value—the inherent dignity—of people, other beings, and institutions in those sectors and that they are all deeply interconnected. With information gathered across boundaries, the shaman then makes sense of what has been learned for other people so that they, too, can understand it. It is in these three capacities that, we believe, wisdom arises and that leaders learn to treat others with dignity, for the shaman as leader inherently respects the worth of both other people and the world around us in ways that more self-interested individuals do not.

Before going further, we offer the following definition of wisdom as it will be used here: wisdom is the integration of moral imagination (the good), systems understanding (the true), and aesthetic sensibility (the beautiful) into decisions, actions, and practices in the service of a better world (Waddock, 2010). Moral imagination is the ability to see the ethical issues embedded in situations and decisions (Werhane, 2002), or what philosophers have long called “the good.” Moral imagination has been linked to systems understanding (actually, “systems thinking,” Werhane, 2002; Senge, 1990), which means a reasonably accurate perspective on the system as a whole, or what we can call “the true.” The third element of wisdom is aesthetic sensibility, or the ability to appreciate the design and aesthetic elements of a situation, decision, organization, or whatever is affected, that is, what philosophers call “the beautiful.”

The integration of these three elements alone is insufficient to qualify as wisdom; they must be put into the service of building a better world to qualify as wise, since acts and decisions that make the

world worse cannot be justified as wise decisions. Further, there is an explicit link to both the shaman and to dignity in this definition, as wisdom enables leaders to address what needs to be healed most in the world today—shattered dignity. It is not just the dignity of people that matters in this context, but equally importantly, the dignity of our enterprises, institutions, nations, and the very planet itself. Shamans, believing that there is spirit in everything, whether alive in the normal use of the word or not, inherently recognize the importance of dignity. Modern shamans similarly sense connections and interconnections among the beings and elements of our planet and accord them dignity.



All humans are born worthy and vulnerable.

Dignity, as used here, is defined as our inherent value, worth, and vulnerability. All human beings are born worthy but at the same time, are vulnerable to having one's worth violated, just as we are all born vulnerable to physical injuries. Understanding dignity requires us to treat this core aspect of our humanity with as much care and attention as the physical aspects of our being. It also means that dignity needs to be accorded to our institutions and to the planet that supports us.

Dignity is also different from respect. It is a common misconception to treat them as the same. While dignity is something we all have by virtue of our birth—all human beings are born worthy—respect, on the other hand, needs to be earned. When people demand to be respected, what they really mean is that they want to be treated as something of value. We have to *do* something to earn respect whereas dignity is just part of our DNA. Respect is something we reserve for people who have done something admirable and inspiring.

An ethical leader, as shaman, understands the central role that dignity and wisdom play in our lives and relationships and is educated in all matters related to dignity, and to wisdom. Although we are all born worthy, we are not necessarily born knowing how to act worthy, nor how to treat others as if they are worthy. An ethical leader recognizes that this fundamental aspect of what it means to be human has to be learned and practiced, just as wisdom is gained through effort and experience. Gaining dignity, knowledge, and wisdom requires effort and commitment—neither comes naturally.

Integrity and Wholeness

Wise and ethical leaders treat others as if they had intrinsic worth, that is, as whole persons worthy of care, with integrity in and of themselves, who need to be valued not for what they can do for the leader but simply because they *are*. Wise leaders recognize the inherent dignity in others, no matter who or where they are. Wise leaders also treat the world around them, nature, our one planet Earth, the same way, much as shamans do. That is, wise leaders recognize the intrinsic worth and value of Earth and value it for that worth, not because its resources can

be exploited for personal or company gain. That attitude is very different from treating others—employees, for example—as means to the end of making money, or treating natural resources as something that should be exploited simply for material or wealth gains. The difference means that people and the world around us are treated as wholes that are worthy of being cared for in and of themselves, not just because they are the means to greater wealth or subjects of exploitation, a fundamental ethical tenet. In recognizing the integrity of the world around us and that of other people, wise leaders treat both people and planet as having intrinsic worth, i.e., with dignity.

The word integrity itself is worth reflecting on in this context, for it has multiple meanings relevant to our discussion of wise and ethical leadership. One important definition of integrity is being honest and having strong moral principles, i.e., a sound ethical base, which relates directly to the idea of wise leadership as we conceive it. This definition relates integrity to truthfulness. In businesses, for example, we typically hope to see integrity—truthfulness—in a company’s accounting statements, and we would hope to also see such integrity in the company’s leaders and employees, its products or services, and its relationships with various stakeholders. A second definition of integrity is equally relevant, however, and that is wholeness, the state of being whole and undivided. Synonyms of wholeness in this context relate to the idea of community, i.e., cohesion, togetherness, solidarity, and unity. In fact, the word integrity is derived from the Latin *integer*, which means whole or complete, and implies consistency of character as well as wholeness. Things that have integrity are also structurally sound and complete.

When we think of the role of wise and shamanic leaders in the world today, as we

have defined them, and particularly in the world that is to come tomorrow, we need to consider all of these ways of viewing the word integrity as it relates to wisdom. We can broaden this way of viewing the idea of the wise leader as having integrity even more by exploring the meaning of whole. “Whole” derives from the old English “hal,” which like integrity has connotations of entire, healthy, sound, genuine, and straightforward, much as the word integrity does. When we think about the relationships among the idea of integrity, wholeness, wisdom, and dignity, it becomes clear that we are talking about much the same things.

If we conceive tomorrow’s wise business leader as embodying the three elements of moral imagination, systems understanding, and aesthetic sensibility in the service of a better world, the importance of integrity in all of its definitions becomes clearer. Wise leaders under this definition understand that their decisions and acts have moral and ethical consequences, and are able to see what the consequences of those actions are likely to be. Indeed, management thinker Russell Ackoff defined wisdom as just that capability—the ability to see the consequences of one’s actions (Ackoff, 1999). Here is where dignity, both of the leader and others with whom the leader interacts, becomes central, for the wise leader, like the shaman, treats others well because that is simply the right thing to do, and because it reflects well on the character of the leader, the company, and the others.

The wise leader also has a grounded and realistic sense of the company as a whole and, importantly, of the broader set of systems within which the company is embedded as well, including the ecological system. Given that systems understanding, the wise leader can make decisions that

respect and honor the various stakeholders with whom the company interacts, and also take due care with respect to the natural environment, as well as the broader social system of which the company is a part. Notably, this systems approach is integrally linked to the connecting role of the shaman, because the systems thinking wise person sees the ways in which different elements and people in the world are interconnected and interdependent. Aesthetic sensibility comes into play when the leader needs to make decisions that will affect the system or when thinking about how to design, e.g., new products and services, new units of the business, and the interactions that the business has with stakeholders. Design choices, which can involve how the company is structured, how it relates to internal and external stakeholders, and how it designs and develops its products and services, among other factors, have a good deal to do with how well the system will retain its integrity (wholeness) after decisions are implemented. Such aesthetic sensibility is aligned with both the sensemaking and connecting capacities of the shaman.

Wisdom, in one sense, is the by-product of making all of these connections. It means recognizing not only our own dignity, but also the dignity of others and of something or things greater than ourselves. These “greater than ourselves” could be organizations, communities, societies, nations, or, for many, a higher power or consciousness of some sort.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Continuing this thinking about wise leadership, shamans, and dignity, we now focus on the differences between efficiency and effectiveness in the leader. The great management thinker, Peter Drucker (1967), once made a distinction between efficiency

and effectiveness that is directly relevant to consideration of what it means to be a wise leader. Drucker said that efficiency is “doing things right.” Drucker meant that the efficient decision maker accepts the system pretty much as it is and tries to work as well as possible with the resources at hand, wasting as little as possible and using those resources to maximize output relative to input. In this sense, efficiency is admirable, assuming that the criteria for what Drucker called effectiveness are met.

Effectiveness is quite different from efficiency, however, and embeds the idea of ethics into decision making. By effectiveness, Drucker meant “doing the right thing.” Doing the right thing requires all three attributes of wisdom—seeing the ethical consequences of a decision or act (moral imagination), understanding how the system will be impacted. As Ackoff said of wisdom, effectiveness means understanding the consequences of decisions and actions (systems understanding), and making the best design choices for the system under the circumstances (aesthetic sensibility). The aesthetic component of wisdom is the least considered, but can be found or the sense that there is a wholeness or completeness that is reflected in statements such as “that’s a beautiful decision.”

From the perspective of the business leader then, wisdom is reflected in effectiveness in Drucker’s terminology. Doing the right or the ethical thing often means questioning the system as it exists, something the shaman does in attempting to heal with new information that fundamentally repairs what some observers call the cultural mythology of the community (Dow, 1986). Perhaps decisions reflecting effectiveness are needed because some aesthetic quality is lacking. That is, there can be some degree

of ugliness in the system reflected in the ways people are being treated (without dignity, for example), or if resources are being misused, wasted, or otherwise abused. Rethinking what the right thing to do under such circumstances requires courage, persistence, systems understanding, and the ability to work well with others, which we also can associate with wisdom, as well as with the attributes of the shaman. Importantly, effectiveness also requires thinking about the inherent worth—dignity—of others with whom one is interacting.

Wisdom thus means treating all stakeholders with respect and dignity, because no matter their position, they are human beings worthy of such treatment, and because there are systems consequences when decisions are ill formed, ill-informed, or ill-treating of others. Whether a person is working at the lowest or highest level of an enterprise, that person deserves to be treated fairly, listened to, and heard, as everyone has something to contribute to the wellbeing and flourishing of the enterprise. One recent example of the systemic consequences that can ensue when decisions do not take into account the wellbeing of stakeholders such as employees and customers can be found in the uproar that occurred in the Boston area when board members tried to oust the CEO of Market Basket supermarkets. Ultimately, the board wanted to sell the company to another chain that would impose “efficiency” measures without consideration for the “effectiveness” question. Market Basket had always been known for treating both its employees with great respect and dignity, through adequate pay, respect, and sound employee policies, and by treating customers well with low prices and good quality products. There was a huge outcry, a long and

difficult series of protests by employees and customers, who believed that these qualities would be lost in the interests of “efficiency” or maximized profits under the new management. Ultimately, the company was returned to its original policies and practices and its original CEO brought back on board to reflect what can only be called “beauty” of the existing system (Korschun & Welker, 2015).



The original CEO of Market Basket clearly understood the power of honoring and recognizing the inherent value and worth of his employees. He also realized that although he and his employees were not equal in status, they *were* equal in dignity. What was also “beautiful” was to observe the way in which his employees were willing to sacrifice everything for (not only) the CEO, but for the dignified environment he had created. They fought for him, and they fought for a way of life—a truth about how to be in the world.

Similarly, community, suppliers, investors, and customers deserve the best that a company can offer because they have a fundamental need to have their own wholeness, that is, their dignity respected. One reason that wisdom is crucial in tomorrow’s leaders is that wholeness and the integrity it provides creates a sense of authenticity, and in an era in which trust in business (and

other institutions) is at an all-time low, authenticity for both individuals and organizations has become increasingly imperative. There are leaders who attempt to make decisions without the three fundamental attributes of wisdom, who are seen as self-serving in the end, in part because they have narrower interests in mind than the good of the whole—or the interests of making the world a better place, i.e., healing it as the shaman does.

Reflecting Purpose

There is another important thing that tomorrow's wise and ethical leader as shaman will have to consider, which is also illustrated in the Market Basket story. The key question for engaging stakeholders with dignity revolves around purpose. Thus, wise leaders ask: What is the core purpose of my firm and how is that purpose reflected in the decisions and actions of leadership and others within the system? When the core purpose of Market Basket was thought to be shifting away from serving customers well and treating employees with dignity in the move towards efficiency and greater profits for shareholders alone, the result was outrage on the part of many stakeholders who had been involved with the firm over the years. In effect, their sense of dignity was affected by the decisions that the new managers were seen to be going to make and their aesthetic sensibility about how the system operated was negatively affected. The decision to restore the original system, which had been highly profitable and working well for many stakeholders, seemed to many "inside" stakeholders to be the right decision. The decision was seen to be, that is, effective under the circumstances, and to reflect the broader set of purposes that had driven the company's success over many years (for

elaboration, see Korschun & Welker, 2015).

Human beings are hard-wired to be competitive and many (particularly economists) would argue, self-interested, though the work of the shaman as wise leader suggests otherwise for many people. Indeed, much of the economics literature is premised on the idea that humans are predominantly self-interested. But humans are equally hard-wired to need connection, nurturing, and cooperation of the sort reflected in the Market Basket's original strategy and ways of relating to its stakeholders. Biologist Frans de Waal's books, *Good Natured* and *The Age of Empathy*, go a long way toward demonstrating the latter case. Other biologists have known for years that symbiosis, i.e., collaboration, and community, i.e., connecting, are as much a part of what makes nature work as is competition among species (e.g., Capra, 1995; Maturana & Varela, 1988).



Connecting with others is essential to wisdom and dignity.

Humans have a natural desire—a need—to connect with others and to cooperate in groups if they are to survive and to thrive. Shamans and shamanic leaders acting with wisdom understand this reality. Part of what it means to be human is to cope successfully with these competing tendencies of cooperation and competition. In his book, *The Meaning of*

Human Existence, Edward O. Wilson (2014), one of the world's most preeminent biologists, tells us that creating collaborative and altruistic groups of people is the next step in the evolution of the human species. If we don't figure out how to be together in a way that creates cohesive and respectful—connected—relationships among people, we will not survive. Wisdom helps us recognize that insight and to act on it. Wisdom also helps us recognize the inherent dignity in all living beings, including ourselves and other people. Wisdom is thus a crucial aspect of ethical leadership in our fraught world. It is wisdom, we believe, that helps us, as humans, transcend the tensions inherent in our lives to do the work that is needed for the world to become a better place, moving us on the right road toward the evolution of our species.

Wisdom, Dignity, and Relationships with Others

What, specifically, would ethical leaders have to know about dignity in order to be effective at honoring it in their lives and organizations?

Futurist, John Naisbett, claims that the most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will not occur because of technology, but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human. What we now know is that a fundamental aspect of our shared humanity is the universal desire to be treated as something of value—to be treated with dignity (Hicks, 2011). A wise and ethical leader first and foremost understands the importance of treating people as if they mattered and has incorporated the following elements of dignity into his daily practice of leadership:

The Essential Elements of Dignity:

- **Acceptance of Identity**—Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity
- **Recognition**—Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experience
- **Acknowledgment**—Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating, and responding to their concerns and what they have been through
- **Inclusion**—Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation)
- **Safety**—Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm, and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, so that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution
- **Fairness**—Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed upon laws and rules
- **Independence**—Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility
- **Understanding**—Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them

- **Benefit of the Doubt**—Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity
- **Accountability**—Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors

Equipped with this knowledge of dignity—how to treat people in a way that honors their inherent value and vulnerability—wise and ethical leaders can not only provide a pleasant environment for people to work, but also give them an opportunity to grow and flourish. As Johan Goethe reminds us, *“Treat people as they want to be and you help them become what they are capable of being.”*

Wise and ethical leaders, whether they are in business or elsewhere, do far more than run a company and manage people. They know how to bring out the best in people and foster their development, they foster purpose and meaningfulness in the workplace, and they treat others with dignity. In effect, as shamans, they help others heal themselves—and they do much the same for the organizations and world around us. When employees feel that their dignity is honored in all the ways described above, they do not have to waste precious time worrying about their worth and value to the company. They are open to learning and expanding their view of the world. Wise and ethical leadership, that is, the leader as shaman, promotes human development.

Can Wisdom Be Accelerated?

Most observers believe that wisdom comes with experience, and, often, age. The question for tomorrow’s ethical leaders is, can learning to be wise, and consequently learning to treat others with the dignity that they deserve, be

accelerated and if so, how? Can one learn to become a shaman? We believe that there are a number of things that can be done to begin to develop wisdom much earlier than many people do. We believe also that everyone has the capacity to be shamanic if they can put aside their fear and work towards healing the world. One thing, for example, which has been demonstrated to enhance systems understanding and moral imagination (and possibly aesthetic sensibility), is some sort of mindfulness practice (Crilly, Schneider & Zollo, 2008). Various reflective practices, meditation, and some physical activities like qi gong, tai qi, yoga the state known as “flow,” among others, also seem helpful in creating space for consideration of issues that go beyond day-to-day pressures, which seems necessary to enhance both wisdom and appreciation of dignity.

If we tease apart the elements of wisdom and dignity, we can begin to see that exposure to various forms of diversity, time in nature, appreciation of values that go beyond financial values, including artistic endeavors of a wide variety, could conceivably open tomorrow’s business leaders to considerations beyond monetary and efficiency ones. Bringing ethical and moral issues deliberately to the fore—without providing answers by fostering what management scholars, Fred Bird and Jim Waters, called “good conversations” can also help. “Good conversations” are those in which the ethical elements are openly admitted. Such conversations can also help to overcome “moral muteness” or the inability to sense and speak about moral issues and foster movement toward wisdom (Bird and Waters, 1989).

Exposure to the complexity of whole systems, working in teams whose actions have real consequences, and exercises that illustrate the whole rather than just one functional area or part of a system

can, we believe, help to foster greater systems understanding. Further, there is need to enhance the ability to really “see” what is going on, reflected in the idea of aesthetic sensibility and a realistic system understanding. By exposing people to whole systems, not just atomized versions of systems, we can begin to enhance these capabilities. By openly thinking about the design of a system, or even a decision, we can foster greater appreciation for the consequences that attend to a decision. Too much of our education fragments knowledge and expects the integration (note that we are back to the idea of wholeness here) to take place in the individual’s mind without reference to the whole. Wise leaders know, however, that the whole is something more and different than the parts, and is valuable in and of itself.

Getting future leaders to work collaboratively on important problems—and teaching them the fundamentals of teamwork rather than just throwing them together—can help them develop greater perspective on the contributions that others, especially others unlike themselves, can offer. Finding ways to enhance understanding of diversity, and developing excellence in listening and perspective-taking, although advanced skills, do not seem too much to ask of tomorrow’s leaders. Whether in business or elsewhere, given the global nature of the world and its complexity, being exposed to people who are different from one’s self, and the need to take responsibility for one’s own actions, can similarly enhance the ability of future leaders to understand the need to treat others with dignity as an essential aspect of their work. Such methods foster an approach to leading and managing that is premised on treating others and the world about us well, rather than being the “tough” boss who is too frequently, and we believe, wrongly, lauded

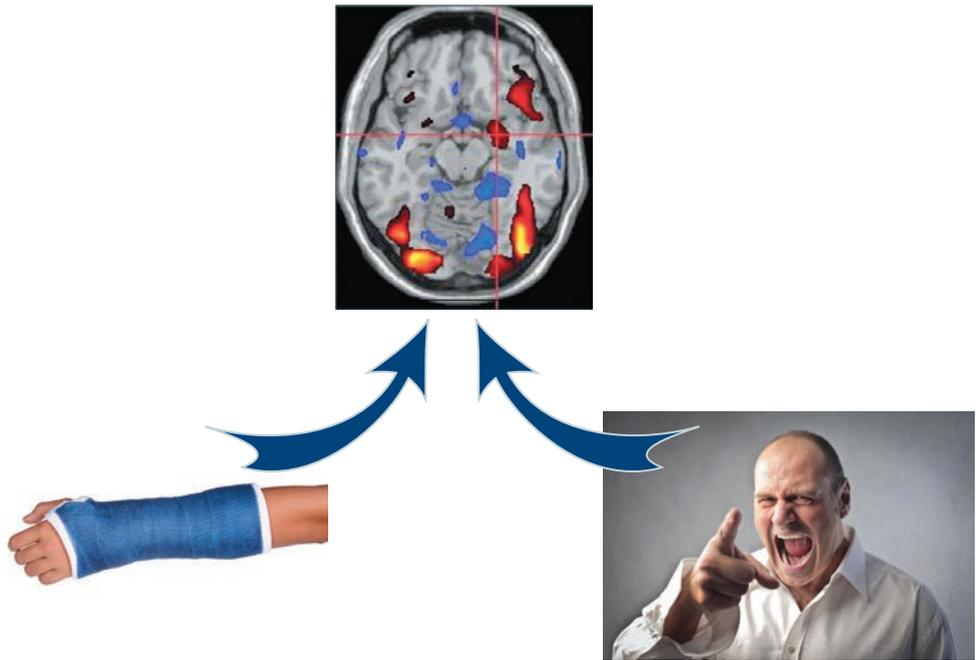
in the business press.

One more word about diversity. While it is critical that an ethical leader understand the differences others bring to an organization, a wise leader also knows that understanding “difference” is not the end of the road. She recognizes that there is (at least) one more step in the process, which is to find ways to create unity within a team, something that can bring everyone together toward a common purpose, i.e., as the shaman does, help them make important connections and make sense of their world for themselves and others. In dignity terms, that “unity” is achieved by recognizing and honoring the dignity that everyone yearns for. It is the transcendent identity that all peoples can rally around: *everyone wants to be treated with dignity. It is our highest common denominator.*

Tomorrow’s leaders will live in what is nothing less than a fishbowl, in which all of their actions and activities can and will be scrutinized—and potentially put up for even greater scrutiny through social media. Leaders whose actions get them in trouble will increasingly find it difficult to maintain their credibility—and the respect of important stakeholders. Thus, it is important that we begin thinking about educating and developing leaders who take seriously the need for treating others with dignity and for developing their own wisdom and shamanic capacities as early in their careers as possible.

Conclusion: Wisdom, Dignity, and the Ethical Leader

There is no doubt that in the 21st century, we are learning a lot about what it means to be human. In addition to the profound wisdom on Ubuntu, which focuses our attention away from the individual aspects of our humanity to the truth of our connectedness—“I am



Neurological research shows that violations of dignity result in similar brain activities as those caused by physical injuries.

because we are”—science is also making a major contribution to our understanding. In matters relating to dignity, we are learning that our brains are wired to connect to one another (Lieberman, 2013). We are also learning about how our brains react to being treated badly. Neuroscientist Naomi Eisenberg’s research shows us that our brains react the same way to a dignity violation as it does to a physical wound. Yet, people are frequently diminished, excluded, and humiliated in the workplace.

Understanding the importance of dignity, connections, and healing is an everyday kind of wisdom that is essential for ethical, wise, and shamanic leadership. Because our mutual humanity is bound up, inextricably with one another, it is imperative that we know how to be in

relationship in a way that keeps those bonds healthy and whole. We now know what it means to embody this wisdom, and we know that we cannot do it without dignity. Further, we know that wisdom is a by-product of deep connection, not the connection itself. Ethical leadership is really about tapping our inner shamans, as leaders, and beginning the work of healing our wounded humanity and planet.

Q&A

Below are highlights of the question-and-answer session with Donna Hicks and Sandra Waddock and Bentley University students, faculty, staff, and guests.

QUESTION:

I'm curious from your perspectives, why do you think truly wise and dignified leaders seem to be so rare in the business world?

SANDRA WADDOCK: Other than the fact that they don't already understand dignity, I think we don't teach people about wisdom, and I don't think our system orientates them towards wisdom. There is a very short term orientation that many of our businesses have. This system is actually pressuring people for one kind of result and that result is profitability. As long as you are focused only on the efficiency aspect of things like profitability, then it is really hard to get to the broader issues that businesses are really all about — meeting a need for someone in a way that does not harm other people, while taking into account ecological

as well as people considerations. I don't think we are actually educating people to do that and our system doesn't foster that very well.

DONNA HICKS: I spent quite a number of years in the business community after my book came out and people heard of the dignity work. When I worked with the leadership of these corporations, I was astonished by the fact that they were not bad people, but rather were wonderfully committed people who felt they were doing the right thing. But, as Sandra mentioned, there was an ignorance; they just didn't understand the consequences of their actions, or the fact that they set the tone in a work environment. As she said, these are things that we have never been educated to build as part of our leadership repertoire. Victor Hugo said that "There is nothing

more powerful than an idea whose time has come.” And I think that applies to dignity and wisdom as well. We have done enough damage to each other whether it is in the workplace or in our relationships. It is time to figure out how to treat each other in a way that brings out what’s best in us, rather than the worst.

SANDRA WADDOCK: I would say that we need to do that with respect to the natural environment as well. It’s not just humans that have an inherent dignity and sense of worth, it is also the other creatures that are on the planet. The truth is, we as human beings, cannot survive over the long term without those other creatures. Even though we like to think that we can, we really can’t.

QUESTION:

I was wondering, how do you address conflicts in the workplace without wounding someone’s dignity?

DONNA HICKS: That is a complicated question. First, let’s say that you are the direct report of someone and your boss violates your dignity. When I went into consulting with companies, this was the problem. Employees did not feel it was safe to speak up to their boss when their boss was violating their dignity because it was not part of the culture to address dignity violations. These bosses did not realize they were violating the dignity of others, and the culture did not support their being able to have that conversation. Let’s say you want to go to your boss and say “I’m sure you weren’t aware of it and didn’t intend it, but when you made a joke about me in that staff meeting yesterday, I was the only one who wasn’t laughing. It was

really hurtful.” What I do is to go into these companies and talk to them about how to create a culture where it is actually normal to bring dignity into this conversation. I work with the bosses and they learn how to take the feedback of their employees, and I also work with the employees to help them to become skillful at giving the feedback. Because you can give feedback like a weapon, if you are all agitated and upset and you give someone feedback, believe me, it is not going to be effective. You will hurt them because you want to attack them. Your self-preservation instincts make you want to go for the jugular. In the beginning people think, “Are you kidding me, I have to give my boss feedback? You have to be nuts; that is career suicide.” But, you need to get the bosses to agree that this is in their best interest as well. So, that is why this is a development in the culture, not just interpersonal relations. We are aiming at creating a culture where it is safe to be vulnerable.

QUESTION:

Do you have any suggestions for Netanyahu and Obama in terms of dealing with each other that might lead to some constructive results?

SANDRA WADDOCK: My former colleague, Bill Torbert, used to talk about a way of interacting that relates very much to what Donna just said. He talked about four parts of speech: framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring. The framing tells you what the situation is and what you are trying to do together. The advocating says “I have a position on this, here is what I think.” The illustration is the example. But, it is the inquiring part that is most important. Can you tell me how you got to your position and what is the reasoning for your position?

Share your assumptions with me and let's see whether we have any common ground because in most positions, I suspect, there will be some common ground. But, if we are coming at each other from a discussion point of view rather than a dialogue point of view, we are likely to get into conflict. The idea of discussion, concussion and percussion all have the same root, which is to clash with each other. Whereas dialogue has the sense of what we also call "third-way thinking," coming to something from a perspective where we can share some ground. It might not be the position where either one of us started, but it might be where we can have some common ground.

QUESTION:

Both of you take the approach of being very gentle and understanding, but in the case of international conflict, do you believe that there are situations that require more firm and aggressive approaches to the resolution of conflict?

DONNA HICKS: First of all, dignity work is not gentle work. People are terrified to do dignity work because they think they have to make themselves vulnerable and indeed it is required. It is not touchy-feely stuff. I have worked with the most intractable conflicts in the world, and if you start threatening them with physical aggressive behaviors, it is not going to work. I am not a pacifist. I'm terrified of ISIS, for example. We need to have some sort of combination of political approach plus a military action. I think we need both approaches. I just don't want you to leave here today thinking the dignity work or the wisdom work, for that matter, are just gentle approaches because you have to be tough as a dignity leader;

there are times where you have to call people on their bad stuff. That is not easy.

SANDRA WADDOCK: The work of the shaman is not gentle. The shamans will tell you there are two states you can be in: love and fear. Most of us live in fear and a lot of our politics today are politics of fear and trying to make people fearful. Getting through that fear is not easy. The only way to get to the other side is to face the fear, walk through the fear, and find out what is on the other side. That takes huge amounts of courage. That is what the shaman has to do. So, if you hope to be a wise/shamanic leader, you need to work through your own fears, some of which may include, "Can I really confront you?" "Can I tell you what your stuff is?" Or, "Am I okay to look at my own stuff?" That is not always easy to do.

QUESTION:

I found your words very inspirational and, as you both said, it is time to really reimagine what leadership is. My question to both of you is, knowing there are a lot of young business-people in the audience, what are some words of wisdom you can give them on how to approach leadership as they are entering into different companies?

SANDRA WADDOCK: I would say, ask a lot of questions and be open to the answers. Look inside yourself and see what it is that you really think is important and where you can make a contribution. However early you are in your career, put yourself in the position to begin to make a contribution, because we all have something we can contribute and that is what we need to recognize. The world needs us to be in a healing mode, not in a destructive mode.

DONNA HICKS: I would say a similar thing. I think one of the things we have to be cognizant of, no matter if we are going into the business world or whatever career we chose to embark on, is to recognize the extent to which all of us have to actually learn how to be in relationships with other people in a way that is mutually honoring. Have you ever learned to be in a relationship with someone where you are bringing out the best in each other? It's not part of our educational consciousness; it's just not. So, I think, as Sandra was saying, we need to ask, "What do I need to do to improve my abilities and be a good, really strong member of a team and a work community?" We have to expand our own emotional capacities and expect more of ourselves than we do of others. Because, you know, when we have bad relationships with people, we like to feel that it's always about them. We like being the innocent victim in a failed relationship. But, the really hard work of dignity is really about responsibility taking. How can I improve this situation? What kind of contribution did I make to a failure? And what does responsibility actually mean? And, for those of you that are going into businesses, I would ask, the company that you are working for, what are your responsibilities and theirs, especially as it relates to the common good.

SANDRA WADDOCK: And, I would add, can you collaborate in this company? The idea of bringing out the best in each other is so important, but, it has to start with you, because the only person you can control is yourself. You can't really control other people, even if you are a leader.

QUESTION:

My question is for Dr. Hicks. Your presentation on dignity addressed several issues among which were the ideas of a sense of inclusion, safety and security, and even-handed treatment. An issue of concern in the academic community across the country, and here at Bentley, involves the fair treatment of adjunct faculty in such matters as equal pay for equal work, some degree of job security, and maybe some degree of prorated benefits. The question is, how do we reconcile Bentley's stated commitment to ethical behavior with the administration's opposition to changes in the working conditions of adjunct instructors in such matters?

DONNA HICKS: Because I had such limited time, I spent most of my time talking about interpersonal learning about dignity — how we treat each other so as to honor the dignity of each other. But, most of the work I do in the corporate environment, education, and everywhere, is about looking at the systemic indignities that are inherent within organizations. If I were working with the leadership of an organization such as an educational institution, in which people, such as the adjunct faculty, were expressing feelings of lack of fairness and equity, I would hold what I call "dignity dialogues." I wouldn't ignore the problems because I don't think they will go away if you ignore them. I wouldn't go through normal negotiations. I would propose to the leadership of both groups to hold dignity dialogs because it is really at the core of the issue.

QUESTION:

It sounds like you are referring to dignity primarily as an emotional thing. In the United Nations and other international organizations, to live with dignity means to have a decent quality of life — access to water, food, shelter, etc. Relating this to business, how would you respond to situations in which there are huge geographical and cultural distances — for example, someone in this country is calling the shots for folks working for Nike in Indonesia — in which wages and working conditions do not meet their dignity needs?

SANDRA WADDOCK: Well, there is a huge amount of work being done in the corporate social responsibility arena, looking at that exact issue. There are a lot of institutions that are working to create pressures on companies so that their practices are both more visible and more responsible, including trying to certify them. But, one of the issues you point out rightly is a problem created by distance and as long as there is that distance, it's really easy to hide the problematic practices and indignities, to use Donna's language. (This situation is not dissimilar to the one discussed a moment ago regarding adjunct faculty.) Problems will remain until the leaders of those companies bridge the distance by actually going to see and experience the conditions themselves, and sit down not for a negotiation but a dialogue so that both sides understand the systemic situation. Together, they need to know why it is what it is, from the perspective of not just one side, but both sides, because both sides probably have some legitimate claim. I do think a lot has been going on to respond to the situation you have highlighted, and a great deal of good has occurred in the past

20 years. There is a long way to go obviously, but you have to keep pressuring companies to do better.

DONNA HICKS: One quick comment. You said that I am talking about dignity in “emotional terms.” I started out my work as a human rights educator and I knew all the conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I taught them. I worked with people in Cambodia and other parts of the world. Yes, the Universal Declaration and other UN conventions are brilliant, absolutely brilliant, and the world needs them. What I found to be their shortcomings is that there are other more psychological ways that people were experiencing assaults to their dignity. They might have had healthcare or education, they might have had all of those things, but they were still suffering indignities because they were being treated as something less. That is why I have done this part of the dignity equation, because I think the psychological, everyday indignities, that each and every one of us can tell stories about, these are the insidious and toxic indignities that affect people even in this prosperous country we are living in right now.

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BENTLEY
UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Business Ethics**

MAIL Center for Business Ethics, Bentley University,
175 Forest Street, Waltham, MA 02452 USA

EMAIL cbeinfo@bentley.edu

WEB bentley.edu/cbe

PHONE +1 781.891.2981

FAX +1 781.891.2988