

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



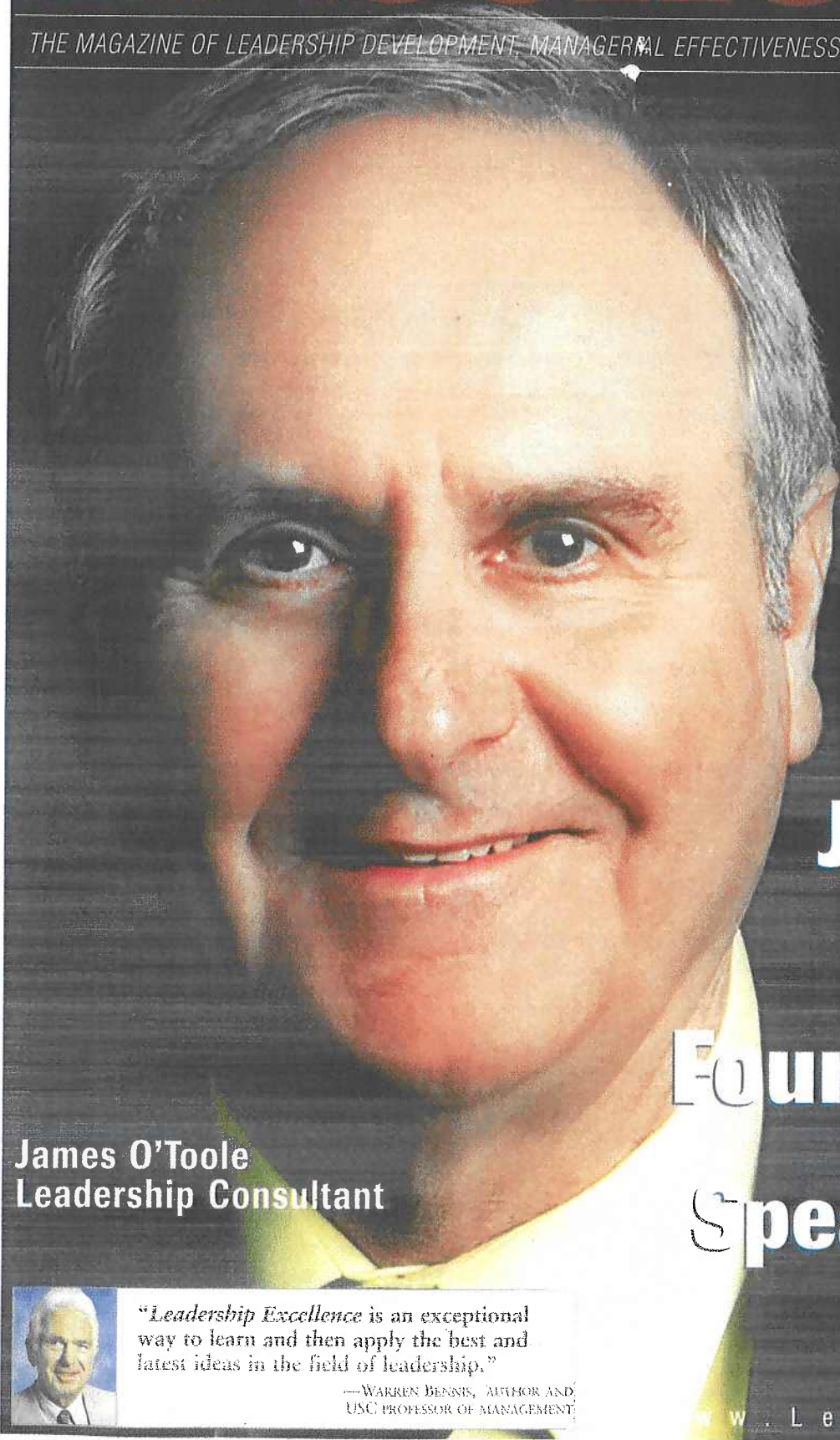
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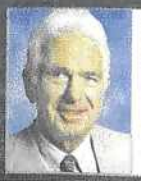
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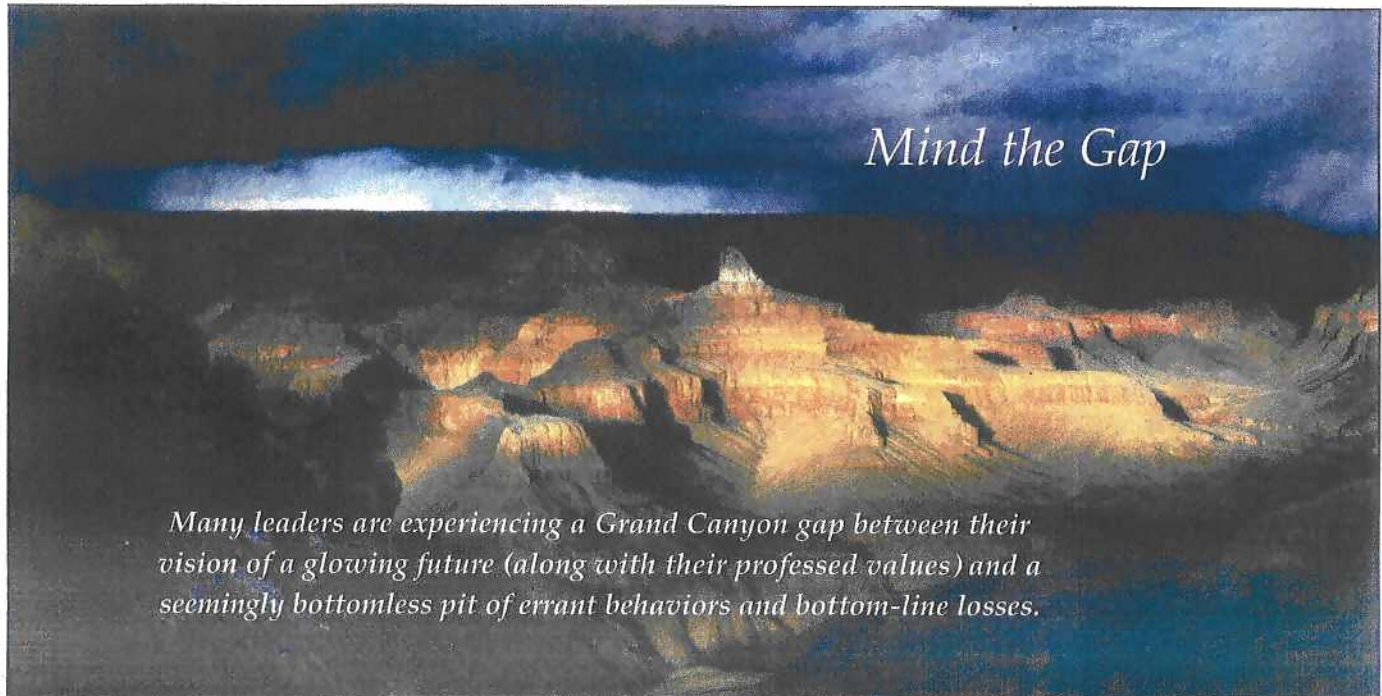
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Mind the Gap

Many leaders are experiencing a Grand Canyon gap between their vision of a glowing future (along with their professed values) and a seemingly bottomless pit of errant behaviors and bottom-line losses.

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Leaving a Legacy

Lead sustainable enterprise.



by Jeana Wirtenberg

THE WORLD IS AT A tipping point: uninformed decisions—or decisions that simply maintain the status quo—may bring on irreversible catastrophes. Global warming, species extinction, and loss of biodiversity, poverty, inequity, and war are daunting and can easily lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair. Challenges today demand creative, novel leadership based on the confidence to make profound choices that move us from cultures of *either/or* to one of *both-and*.

Systemic, deep-rooted problems require systemic, long-term solutions that engage key constituencies in deep inquiry. Familiar solutions stemming from a single discipline or sector are inadequate. With new ways of thinking and being, you can help change the course of history—and improve your bottom line. While set in a global context, the most-effective solutions are locally developed and applied.

Which path will you choose? We invite you to explore familiar solutions and new possibilities, encompassing both incremental and radical change, and harnessing our imagination, creativity, and commitment to creating a sustainable future.

Qualities of a Sustainable Enterprise

A study of nine sustainable companies identified a *Sustainability Pyramid* of seven core qualities associated with implementing sustainability strategies and achieving triple bottom line (social, environmental, and financial) results, along with the necessary contributions of human capital practices.

“Foundation” contains deeply held corporate values consistent with sustainability, top management’s visible support for sustainability, and its placement as central to strategy.

“Traction” is achieved by developing sustainability metrics and by aligning formal and informal organization systems around sustainability.

Toward the top of the pyramid is “Collaborative Integration.” At this stage, the many facets and functional domains of sustainability are coordi-

nated through stakeholder engagement and integration. Even the best firms on the triple bottom line struggle to reach this cross-boundary, multi-stakeholder, integrative pinnacle. Deeply infusing sustainability-oriented values and creating integration seem to be the highest-level challenges.

Creating a Sustainable Enterprise

Sustainability strategies vary widely as companies learn to take advantage of the social, environmental, and economic opportunities offered by their location, community, and placement in the global market. However, two fundamental elements remain: for these strategies to be successful, they must be integrated into the company’s core business plan and leaders must wholeheartedly support them.

Companies become sustainable using divergent strategies. GE increased



its sales through its Ecomagination initiative. Wal-Mart reduced waste and harmful materials in its supply chain. Unilever addressed the social concerns at the “bottom of the pyramid,” vastly expanding its market, with 40 percent of its revenue now coming from developing countries. And Interface, icon of sustainability, has done it all.

These firms are seeing that an integrated triple bottom line that balances attention to employees/society, the environment, and financial outcomes is critical to the world’s sustainability and to a company’s own long-term viability in the global marketplace.

Future and Beyond: Three Scenarios

Scenario 1: Things fall apart.

Organizations give up trying to be sustainable. Businesses just want to survive in an increasingly anarchic world, plagued by global war for natural

resources, especially oil and water.

Scenario 2: Muddling toward sustainability. At best a mixed bag and, at worst, an utter mess. Global agreements on everything have symbolic value, but they have no real teeth and are ultimately ineffective.

Scenario 3: A global sustainability culture. When this culture takes root, a cultural tipping point is reached. Factors shaping it are alarming scientific findings, changes in climate patterns, geopolitical conflicts, global media networks, innovations in the marketplace, and success of “green” business. The confluence of these factors creates a “preservation mindset” or “global sustainability culture.”

Where will sustainable business practices be in the next 10 years? Much depends on whether business leaders and managers gain greater awareness of sustainability and continue to choose to adopt sustainability-related values, strategies, principles, and practices. The choice is ours to make.

Leading a Sustainable Enterprise

How can we as leaders make our greatest contributions and become catalysts for a global sustainability mindset? How can we move our organizations and stakeholders from hopeless, helpless, and immobilized to engaged, inspired, and in action?

We invite you to engage in an authentic conversation, in a spirit of discovery, starting with the assumption, “We don’t know what we don’t know,” and asking along with the profound question, “What else is needed?” “What questions do I need to ask myself and others?” Engage with people’s natural tendency to self-organize, bring people at all levels into the conversation, and listen deeply. What you hear may bring you to a new starting point. Look to nature. Widely dispersed in organizations and natural systems are the energy, creativity, and intelligence to create the necessary solutions.

You can create a legacy to be proud of, fired by imaginative leaps, innovation, and inclusiveness and founded on a profound sense of gratitude for our people and planet. The sustainable enterprise can nourish the spirit of the people, help regenerate resources, and lift the economic well-being of generations to come. What a legacy to leave. LE

Jeana Wirtenberg is a Director at Farleigh Dickinson University (www.fdu.edu/lise), President of Jeana Wirtenberg & Associates (www.whentitalcomestogether.com), and author of *The Sustainable Enterprise Fieldbook* (AMACOM). Visit www.thesustainableenterprisefieldbook.net.

ACTION: Define your legacy.