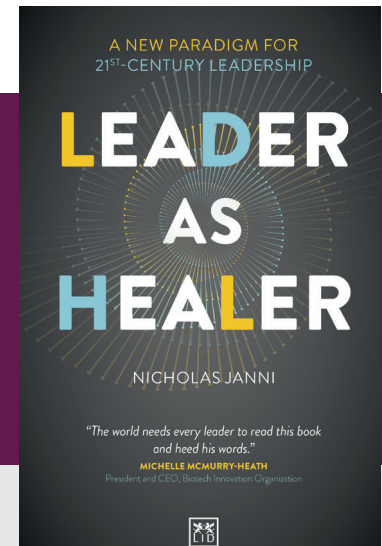


# Leader as Healer

## A New Paradigm for 21st Century Leadership

By Nicholas Janni



*"Nicholas Janni is a pioneer in transformational leadership and in his new book beautifully captures the current zeitgeist in business. Presented as a modern-day path for a leader or a roadmap for maturing organizational culture, he focuses on the importance of emotions, embodiment, relational attunement, higher purpose, mindfulness and service to life. Written from the heart of a seeker, the sensibility of a theatre director, the expertise of a top team coach and the vision of an activist, Leader as Healer is a primer for leading in the Century ahead."*

— AMY ELIZABETH FOX, CEO, MOBIUS EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

### From the Introduction

This is a book about the highest levels of presence and peak performance leadership, and the cultures that ensue from them, in which wellbeing, results and contribution to the world are naturally interwoven.

It is, above all, a call to break from the chronically imbalanced ways of thinking and functioning that have become the norm in so many corporate cultures, where 'doing' eclipses 'being,' and hyper-rational, analytical thinking relegates feeling, sensing, intuiting and the transpersonal to the outer fringes of life.

I believe that the failure to correct this imbalance is severely detrimental not only to individual and organizational performance, but to our capacity for creating healthy, thriving futures.

In the book, I outline a theoretical and practical path to a new paradigm of leadership. It is a path of *restoration* through which we reintegrate previously exiled aspects of our nature: physical, emotional and transpersonal.

On this pathway, the brilliance and sophistication of the thinking self takes its rightful place alongside the sensing and feeling selves, together creating a much larger, more holistic intelligence.

To face the scope and threats of 21st-century challenges, today's leaders must possess potent powers for logic, reason, discernment and strategic forecasting. Yet, they must also be empathic and, therefore, embodied; grounded and, therefore, intuitive. They must be skilled in mindfulness and deep listening; present and receptive to higher levels of insight and innovation; able to inspire authentic engagement and collaboration; and possess a clear and wholehearted sense of service, mission and purpose.

I call this leader the *Leader as Healer*.

In recent decades, as the world has driven for growth and efficiency above all else, the Leader as Executor became the dominant global business

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model, the prevailing standard that sees ‘great’ leaders as drivers of action and agents of discipline. Their relationships are transactional, and their goals are primarily instrumental: maximize profit and shareholder returns. The power of Executors rests in a metaphorical sword to be wielded on the perpetual battlefield of business competition. And it is a war of attrition.

Executors operate from a narrow bandwidth, characterized by the primacy of the rational, strategic mind. They are generally disconnected from their emotional and physical selves, which creates an absence of deep listening and receptivity. Executors function almost constantly in a ‘doing’ modality with little or no access to ‘being.’

But all models must evolve to meet changing circumstances.

The global COVID-19 crisis has exposed executor-oriented leadership for what it now is: inadequate to meet the huge systemic challenges facing us in ‘the new abnormal.’ It is inadequate because the rational, linear mind always seeks to reduce everything into knowable, predictable, replicable terms. Yet, the increasing complexity of our times cannot and will not yield to such an approach. To thrive, not merely survive amidst heightened disruption requires new strategic competencies, heightened levels of

innovative thinking and advanced capacities for receptivity and openness.

That execution-oriented leadership is still regarded as the gold standard, the model by which all others must operate, is testament to how entrenched we have become in a paradigm that no longer serves us. Blind adherence to this outmoded style creates leaders who are no longer fit for purpose and a modality of function that poses a threat to the long-term health of our societies.

I find in my work that most executives instinctively know when they are leading in an unbalanced and unsustainable way. They know it because of the stress and frustration it induces. They know it because of the lack of meaning and connection and, sometimes, even despair they experience. Yet, in the field of business education, there is remarkably little emphasis or instruction on the inner development of the leader, or the emotional, ethical and spiritual maturity that is required of them. People are thrust into senior positions of responsibility with a lack of preparation that, in many other fields, would be unthinkable.

Even before the pandemic, many chief executives and senior leaders were speaking about the new capacities they realized they needed to develop in increasingly unpredictable environments. Chief amongst these: being comfortable with uncertainty,

Principles of the *Leader as Healer* examined in the book, along with detailed self-reflection and practices for each

- Foundation – Being and Doing
- Embracing our Emotions
- The Power of Embodiment
- A Life of Purpose
- Mindfulness and Meditation
- The Call

and able to embrace paradox, doubt and ambiguity without rushing to an ineffective fix. They revealed a growing need to meet and adapt to complexity with much more than the linear, formulaic strategies of the past. Since the pandemic, instability has grown exponentially. One of my CEO clients recently said to me: “I am understanding more and more that I simply cannot lead, cannot formulate strategy, in any of the ways I did before. I am in a completely new land.”

Individually and collectively, we find ourselves more than ever engulfed in a volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) environment. Recently, a new acronym entered the corporate lexicon: Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear and Incomprehensible (BANI). The growing scale of the systemic challenges before us is far beyond anything we have faced before. To meet the moment, we need new frameworks of understanding and higher capacities with which to lead. Today’s leaders must be able to embrace complexity, grapple with ambiguity, and express authentic empathy. They must learn to access the wisdom and emotional skill required to steer the ship in a rapidly changing world. They must be people who seek opportunities for genuine inner development, for themselves and those they lead. They must be able and willing to create cultures of real engagement in which people give the best of themselves, and experience the deep satisfaction that comes with seeking to contribute more than to take.

### An Emerging Model – Leader As Healer

In the context of leadership, *healing* does not refer to the physical. Rather, it is:

- The *restoration of unity*, bringing those parts of us and the systems within which we work that are fragmented and/or exiled back into a coherent whole
- The *rebalancing* of our thinking, emotional and physical selves
- The *transformation* of stagnant energy, leading to greater vitality, enhanced connection, and higher intelligence and wisdom
- The *awakening* of transpersonal levels of consciousness
- And a precise *excision* of that which is toxic, unhealthy and dangerous to the whole

Healers are leaders who have highly developed rational minds and have likewise invested in their emotional and psychological development. They are leaders who transmit embodied presence. They have explored and sufficiently reintegrated wounded parts of themselves and developed higher levels of consciousness and innovative capacity, abilities described by all cultures for thousands of years. As a result, these leaders bring to the table their cognitive, emotional and embodied physical selves; no part of the whole is excluded.

The Leader as Healer sees the world, its problems and potential solutions in very different ways than the Leader as Executor. The Healer can analyze and strategize every bit as well as the Executor, but knows what it means to connect with themselves and others, to integrate being and doing, proactivity and receptivity, rationality and intuition.

The Healer both understands and embodies the essence of coherent presence: *I’m here, and I’m available*. They recognize the power of fostering connection and know, for instance, that just one minute of quality attention paid to a colleague or employee is priceless. Where the Executor builds cultures of absence on a foundation of disconnection, the Healer creates cultures of presence on a foundation of interconnection.



Critically, the Healer utilizes power very differently than the Executor. In place of the sword, a Healer chooses the scalpel. He or she understands that feeling and empathy are essential, but not always sufficient. True leadership sometimes requires that one decisively excise moral and spiritual tumors from the bodies of organizations or nations. And, like all good surgeons, Healers seek to preserve any and all healthy tissue, to the greatest extent possible.

This emergent model of leadership unlocks parts of ourselves that have long been pushed aside, and even derided, in order to expand our operating bandwidth. By bringing higher levels of consciousness to our work, we find we can access much more nuanced information, much subtler signals. We can unlock new reserves of energy and inspiration, elevating our efforts and those of our teams to higher levels of efficiency, innovation and impact.

This style of leadership is a journey that demands transformational inner work and uncovers new reserves of wisdom and empathy. It is a path that marries the sophistication of rationality and the brilliance of science to the profound understandings of timeless wisdom and cutting-edge body-mind psychology, better preparing us to meet the times in which we live.

This fresh and necessarily radical vision offers an entirely new perspective on leadership. As we face ‘the new abnormal,’ the prior model is no longer enough. Simply put, execution-style leadership doesn’t cut it. As Albert Einstein advised, we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.

It is time for a new toolbox.

### A LIFE OF PURPOSE

*Excerpt from Chapter Four*

Generally speaking, there are three ways in which we wake up to and ‘recover’ from a loss of purpose:

**THROUGH A CRISIS**, such as severe illness, bereavement, divorce, employment redundancy, etc. A wake-up is not guaranteed by crisis, but there are hundreds of stories of people whose lives were turned upside down by such events, yet emerged with a renewed sense of purpose and direction.



**In our self-obsessed culture,  
it is easy to forget the deeper  
purpose of mindfulness  
and meditation: to dissolve  
the experience of separation;  
to broaden and transform one’s  
sense of I/me; and to open  
oneself to the mystery of a  
deeply unified field.**

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The great artist, like the great scientist and the great leader, has matured enough to realize that the higher levels of creativity, insight and innovation we crave are not something we do. Rather, they *do us*.

**SPONTANEOUS REALIZATION** occurs through a moment of recognition, when we realize that our guiding purpose has been lost and must be found. This happened to one of my clients after he treated himself to a walking holiday in the Himalayas in celebration of his 40th birthday. One day, as he sat alone, facing a magnificent mountain panorama, he experienced a sudden recognition of how out of balance his incredibly ‘successful’ life actually was. This kind of moment usually inspires new life choices and transformational change.

**VIA DIALOGUE WITH A MENTOR/COACH.** When we find ourselves at a crucial crossroads, we may seek out a companion or coach – a guide with depth and experience. A mentor or coach can encourage us to lean into the unknown and surrender to the darkness, rather than try to get out of it as quickly as possible. Such times often prove to be the most transformational of all.

Indeed, facing questions about the core purpose of our lives needs to be done in a careful, well-supported context. The first requirement is to create a strong enough space – with the help of a mentor or coach, or in the company of a group of trusted and dedicated friends or colleagues – in which the full spectrum of what is happening can be acknowledged and felt. This is important; we need to keep at bay the impulsive leap to rationalize or fix the experience, even if sitting with it is uncomfortable.

Once we engage wholeheartedly, we often discover two types of tension emerging, both of which need to be welcomed and precisely discerned. The first is the *pull of the past*. As noted previously, the experiences from our early lives that we tried to pack away begin to call for attention and take us to the places within where our fundamental needs – to be received, nurtured, and

to belong – were not adequately met. If we allow these places in us to be felt, we begin to see how aspects of the individuals we have become (the ‘somebody’ we have each attempted to build) were in fact subtly but essentially based in the exclusion of these painful parts of our past. This work requires from us a deep level of vulnerability, but it allows our hearts to melt so that qualities of compassion, connectedness and humility may flourish.

The second tension is the *pull of higher levels of consciousness*, which are simply the successive stages of our human psychological and personal development. If mindfulness brings us to a first level of enhanced spaciousness, here we are called to an entirely different level of consciousness. Art, nature and silence become more essential, and a need for rational certainties recedes further into the background. In traditional cultures, people readily recognized this calling and retired into the forests, deserts or caves, literally or metaphorically, for a period of contemplation. No time limit was set for this task because the need to be in control no longer took precedence.

The Leader as Healer is committed to creating a culture in which time for deep contemplation can be honoured without having to leave the world. They also embody the kind of leadership and organization that emerges when our tidy, individualistic identities become less rigid, and we are able to embrace a larger field of connectedness, a deeper sense of purpose and a natural instinct for stewardship and service.

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## THE CALL

*Excerpt from Chapter Six*

As a theatre director, I frequently observed two distinct types of actor: the technically competent actor and the ‘surrendered’ actor.

The former might approach me with a dilemma: “I don’t know what to do with this speech.” My reply was always the same: “Whatever you do with this speech is of small interest compared to what *it* will do with *you*.” Throughout 20 years of work with actors, I researched how to help them lean consistently into what it meant to be a ‘channel,’ a container through which intense frequencies from the full spectrum of humanity could flow, just as they do in any great live musical performance.

When an actor understood this, they were able to speak one line of Shakespeare, for instance, with a completely new impulse of emotion, an unforeseen eruption of energy and aliveness. And, if they had learned how to *surrender* to such flow, to give themselves ‘as if in love,’ then we, in the theatre or the rehearsal room, could be moved to our very core. I remember instances in which the simple words ‘thank you,’ spoken at a climactic moment of a Shakespeare play, could reduce almost an entire audience to tears.

Through the surrendered performer, we find ourselves in the presence of magnificent life force. It is no wonder that people were willing to camp on a sidewalk overnight in sub-zero, midwinter New York to get tickets to see an opera artist like Maria Callas, who gave herself so fully to that force.

The great artist, like the great scientist and the great leader, has matured enough to realize that the higher levels of creativity, insight and innovation we crave are not something we do. Rather, they *do us*. They recognize when it is time to step aside, relinquish control and demonstrate a balance between being and doing. The Leader as Healer has matured enough to know how to bow and surrender to the emergence of new ideas and higher insights. They understand first that many of the innovations we currently need will arrive in this way, and secondly that we cannot know what these emergent qualities will be until they appear. Our task is to cultivate the receptivity in us.

Yesterday’s leaders were masters of incremental change and gradual shift, and were selected and rewarded for their powers of profit-maximization. Today’s leaders must possess potent powers for logic, reason, discernment and strategic forecasting, yet must *also* be empathic and therefore embodied; grounded and therefore intuitive; present and

therefore awake. They must be skilled in mindfulness and deep listening; present and receptive to higher levels of insight and innovation; able to inspire authentic engagement and collaboration; and possess a clear and wholehearted sense of service, mission, and purpose. They are called upon to restore coherence where there is fragmentation and unity where there is division.

They must be both intentional and surrendered, able to embrace the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of our time, so as to become agents through which radical disruption transmutes into radical opportunity, and planetary crisis into global transformation.

They are the heralds of a new future.

This is *Leader as Healer*.

Your time is now. ■



*Originally a director of theatre, NICHOLAS JANNI taught acting at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and directed his own theatre company. He dedicated 30 years to exploring the theory and practice of peak performance flow states. Over the last 20 years, Nicholas has gained an international reputation for his transformational coaching and leadership development programmes, designed for chief executives and top teams from diverse sectors, public and private. He teaches regularly at The IMD Business School and the University of Oxford Said Business School. His transformative work bridges the worlds of creative, personal, spiritual and professional development in a uniquely powerful, relevant and accessible way.*