

The
Awakened Leader 

Leadership as a Classroom of the Soul

by Susan S. Trout, Ph. D

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Personal stories in this book have been changed
to honor the privacy of those involved.

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INTRODUCTION

One day several years ago, I awoke weary and on edge. For months the solution to a conflicted work situation had eluded me. Anxiety shrouded my intuition. I did not know what to say or do to move the problem toward resolution. I held tight to the reins of my belief that my goal as a leader was to keep everyone happy and if I did this, problems would be prevented. There must be a how-to-lead book I had not yet read that contained the magic key to flawless leadership. I assumed that when I found it, I'd no longer experience discouragement and self-doubt. Joy and serenity would fill my workplace.

At some point during the same day, a curious thought calmed my agitated state. Leadership is what it is: inspiring and creative, challenging and dangerous, and at all times a path of service to one's soul. With this realization came my understanding that a veil of ignorance was slowly lifting, revealing the meaning of true leadership.

Perhaps on this particular morning I was ready to see that my life as a leader was less a matter of changing my personality style and more an issue of learning needed by my soul. I wondered what would happen if I began looking at my leadership experiences through the eyes of my soul, rather than through the lens of the world. If I assumed each step in my leadership experience to date had been at the perfect stage of my soul's learning, I could explore what specific qualities and competencies each new challenge was presenting for my development. Leadership, I decided, required going to school—not in a university, but in the classroom of my daily experience as a leader. In this way, I could become more conscious of myself and my relationship to my leadership in the moment-by-moment direction of the Institute.



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The foundation for the essays in *The Awakened Leader: Leadership as a Classroom*

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of the Soul began forming as my awareness of leadership as soul lessons grew. By examining my personal experiences and the common challenges I observed in other leaders, I saw that soul lessons involve the development of qualities and potentials and the dissolving of delusions and illusions that interfere with this development. What we as leaders do not resolve and develop within ourselves is acted out with adverse



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effects in our personal life and in our leadership. This produces hurtful consequences for others and humble lessons for us.

When we as leaders learn our soul lessons, we benefit those we serve. Evidence of our learning can be seen in the quality of our perceptions, decisions, words, and actions. Viewing our leadership in this way provides us with a deep spiritual meaning to our lives, and, as we embody that meaning, its power radiates into the world in ever expanding circles.

In the broadest sense, we are all leaders. We lead our own lives, deciding what we believe, where we live, what work we do, how we allocate our time, and so on. We also have opportunities for leadership that involve others when we engage in activities like preparing the family for a vacation, arranging for the care of an elderly parent, organizing a community event, seeing a problem and taking action to solve it, mentoring a student, heading a project, or seeking political office. Leadership, regardless of its context, provides unique opportunities for personal growth and development and for serving others with our gifts of knowledge, experience, values, loving presence, and wisdom.

These essays are specifically for those who sense a “call to lead” and who view leadership as their primary role and work in the world. I wrote these essays through my eyes as a leader of nonprofit, educational, academic, and social service organizations. They are, however, relevant to the broad definition of leaders and to leaders of both

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nonprofit and for-profit sectors of our society.

My hope is that leaders will consider *The Awakened Leader* as a friend and guide. The essays are a resource for support, nurturance, guidance, and knowledge when feeling alone or when challenged in the leadership role. Once familiar with the content, selecting which essay to read or reread and when to read it will depend on the question and situation the leader is facing. Common questions are “What is happening here? How can I view this from another perspective? What mistake am I making? Where can I get the strength to continue? How can I calmly make this difficult decision?” I have placed reflective questions related to each topic at the end of every essay and encourage readers to add their own. Such inner questioning can help guide our actions, examine and reframe our experience, and know when to seek support from other sources.

The Awakened Leader also provides a way for leaders to discover how they might better support each other and can be used for small group study. In the company of others, we often experience our leadership classroom in a fresh and transformative way. A supportive group of peers can awaken potential in us that otherwise might remain dormant.

Whether used by an individual or group, the intent of this book is to open a door to conscious leadership. The opportunity to practice leadership is, in a true sense, a pathway for the pilgrimage of the soul.