

FOREWORD

by Warren Bennis

We hear it all the time: the world is moving at a fast pace, shattering our points of reference and our landmarks in time and space. The speed at which complexity is accelerating leaves little room for thinking for ourselves. Dealing with this complexity has become THE challenge. Organizations must embrace globalization to survive; families must compose, decompose, and recompose themselves; individuals must appreciate diverging viewpoints and value diversity. To do so they require a twenty-first-century approach and a new kind of leader, one who can reconcile sense of purpose with business.

Leading with Sense helps us do that. It's a fresh, new, and challenging look at business practices and leadership studies, both individual and organizational, that addresses sense of purpose and relationships with wit and candor. It reconciles effectiveness with integrity, hard work with well-being, people's differences with positive interaction. It brings a sense of respect and understanding for others, including those strongly opposed to others' views.

With a distinct French voice and a twist of American culture, Valérie Gauthier connects views and experiences across the European and North American continents while making global diversity a core component of her approach. Wherever you come from, she opens your mind so that you

can find your own path and feel confident about acting on your ideas to create a better future for the world.

The book draws management inspiration from an unlikely source: poets. Poetry carries a universalism that opens the door to every single culture with respect for its uniqueness under the principle of rich and complex language. Poetry is all about delivering a message that provokes emotions, that inspires images and influences ideas, the same way that effective leaders must. I've never seen someone find inspiration for pioneering business practices in poetry, but Valérie makes it seem obvious. Poets interpret symbols for the same purpose as business leaders: to create a sense of belonging and to forge an identity.

This book does the same. It creates links between people's differences and explains why today's world needs light and meaning, intelligence and sensitivity. Leaders must be able to inspire confidence in others. Like poets, they must create a sense of purpose and embody the vision to help those around them build their own paths in the same way.

Today's businesses are looking for executives capable of managing complex situations, fitting into multidisciplinary departments, and steering multicultural teams. In this climate of high demand and higher expectations, mere technical ability is not enough. The ability to understand and collaborate with others, once considered a plus, has become an indispensable qualification. Valérie calls this quality "savoir-relier," or relational know-how. This skill facilitates the development of relationships between individuals, cultures, and ideas. It is a defining characteristic of successful managers.

Further studies, such as the one conducted by Booz Allen Hamilton on recruiters' expectations, confirm the importance of relational intelligence. Companies complain that although many candidates possess sound technical backgrounds and skills, they have difficulty fitting into organizations.

Today, relational intelligence is at the center of a number of theories concerning management and leadership training, including Koestenbaum's Leadership Diamond, MacGregor Burns's model of transactional and transformational leadership, and LMX, or Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory. Concerns over human relations, team building, management, and corporate leadership have all been linked to the notion of relational intelligence.

Born of a reflection on poetry, and the strength of poetic language, the concept of *savoir-relier* has become the source of a wider reflection on the relationship between people to the world, and especially people to each other. Following the principles developed by British historian and philosopher Theodore Zeldin in his *Intimate History of Humanity*, *Leading with Sense* has chosen to adopt a humanist approach to enable people to develop an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics that shape today's organizations. Applying the principle of *savoir-relier* requires going beyond the traditional view of a transmission of theories and techniques. While technical and theoretical mastery are essential to the development of a successful manager, viewing real-life management situations through these alone may distort reality and prevent managers from fully addressing problems at hand.

Leadership must be built step by step, through gestures and conversations. Everyone has potential, tolerance, and an ability to listen and understand, but these differ from person to person. It is in this gap that individuals can learn from each other. The greater the difference between that person and yourself, the greater the effort required to understand each other. Growing that understanding builds the trust that will create confident and influential leadership over time. We are seeing the emergence of a new philosophy of management.

This understanding of *savoir-relier* will lead to a more responsible, intuitive, and human approach to business, which will result in increased balance and productivity. An increasing number of companies are advocating this type of management, which fosters the open exchange of knowledge and experience among co-workers and leads to increased profits. Even more members of Gen Y are looking for meaning in their jobs and in the companies they will join. Thanks to this novel approach, the *savoir-relier* mind-set with its genuine, generous, and generative characteristics will certainly open avenues for new and enriched business practices.