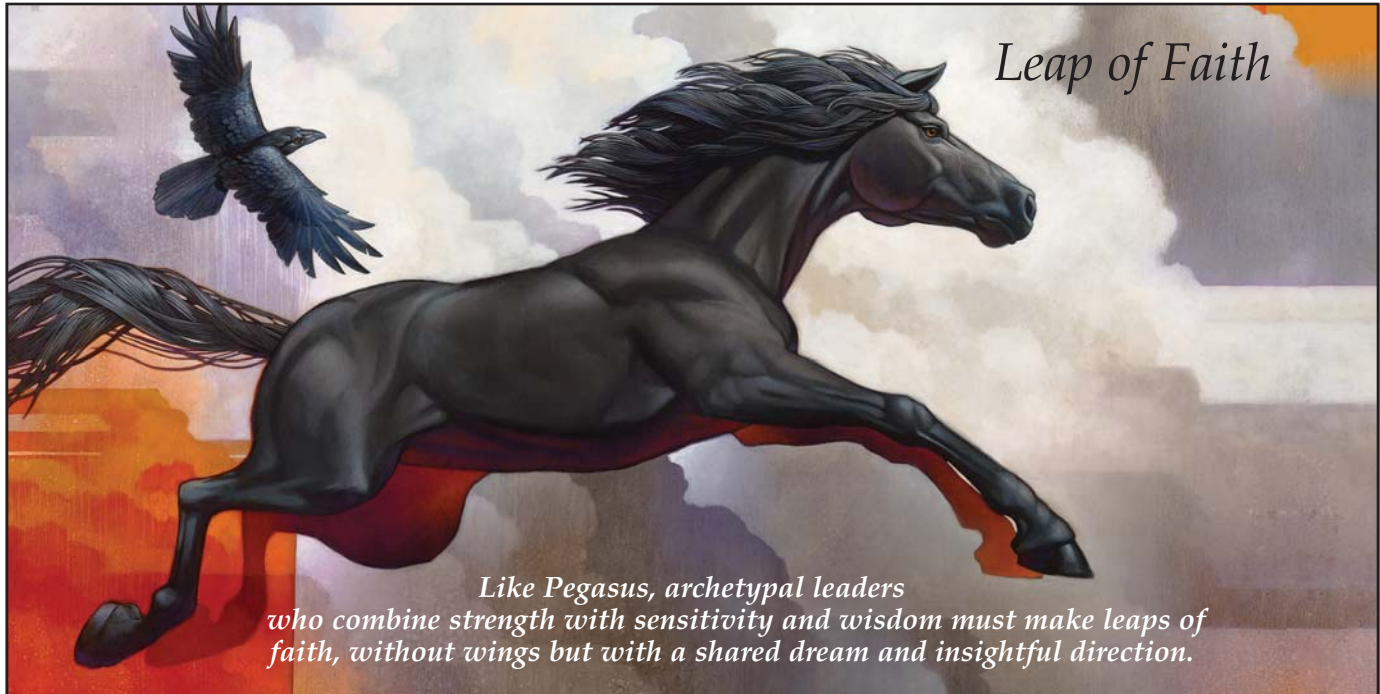


LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



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Like Pegasus, archetypal leaders who combine strength with sensitivity and wisdom must make leaps of faith, without wings but with a shared dream and insightful direction.

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Avoid Fatal Crashes

Leaders and their blind spots.



by Ira Chaleff

EVERY AGE HAS ITS metaphors. From the agrarian age, we get images like *a tough row to hoe* and *closing the barn door after the horses have escaped*. From the industrial age, we get *a wrench in the works* and *the economy overheating*. The age of the internal combustion engine gave us the metaphor of *the blind spot*. We all learned that failing to compensate for *the blind spot* held lethal consequences.

We adopted the *blind spot* metaphor in our *leadership development language*. The famous *JOHARI window*, named after Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, depicted the quadrant of *things known to others but not known to us* and the desirability of reducing its size. 360 assessments (feedback from colleagues all around us), were designed to reveal the content of our blind spots. We could then correct this and avoid *undesirable consequences*. In a year, we would do another 360 to monitor progress.

Really? What would happen if we only looked in our vehicle's *blind spot* once a year? Splat! Since *there are always new risks entering our blind spot*, we must develop the instinct to *always* check our blind spot before changing lanes.

How do we do that? We don't do it by coming into a meeting and declaring "Folks, we're going to make the *biggest and best lane change ever*, and I'll need your total support! Does anybody have a problem with that?" You're sold on the idea, and no one will try talking you out of it once you've made up your mind and announced it to the world. You may demonstrate a type of leadership, but your *risk management grade* is an "F". And if you get away with the blind maneuver three or four times—you stop believing that any 18-wheeler can be in your blind spot. Splat!

Now, what if *you* are driving the 18-wheeler? In a way *you are*. As leader, you're the biggest thing on the road in your unit. Others get *too close to you* at their own risk. Talk about *throwing your*

weight around! You can reach or exceed the speed limit with the best of them, only you weigh 80,000 pounds loaded, to their 3,000 pounds! If you hit something, or overturn, the damage to anyone nearby is massive—and the road is closed until the carnage can be cleared.

Yet, do you know that there are multiple blind spots for the 18-wheeler driver? According to *Edmund's*: "Trucks have large blind spots to the right and rear of the vehicle. Smaller blind spots exist on the right front corner and mid-left side of the truck." And, according to an experienced 18-wheeler driver, "If an 18-wheeler is driving 55 mph, on flat ground, with the roads dry and fully loaded, it will take over the length of a football field to safely stop."

As a leader, you need the equivalent of a *Class A Commercial Driver License* (required of big rig drivers) with no restrictions to the load you carry. Yes, you need to drive fast to reach your destination in time to satisfy customer requirements; and yes, you need to change lanes deftly when your progress is slowed so you stay competitive. But you also need to check the blind spots so you deliver results safely and profitably. How do you do it?

Here are six road rules:

- Place people around you who *tell you what they see*, not what they think you want to see—they're your mirrors and life-savers.

- Always pose your ideas for change by saying "This is what I'm considering" not "This is what we're going to do."

- Always ask for what you may "be missing" or "not seeing" that could pose additional risks to manage.

- Listen to responses carefully. Give others full latitude to advise you how to manage the risk or not take the risk.

- Question their reasoning respectfully. Seek to understand and verify their data and reasoning, not to humiliate.

- Make your decision based on the data in this situation, not on risks you have gotten away with. Be an adult driver, not an invincible teenager.

The *vehicle* and *driver* metaphor may be nearing its end. The next metaphor may be the *onboard robot* that won't let us change lanes unless safe to do so and of the *personal drone* that gives us eyes in the sky! For now, keep looking over the shoulder! *Every time!* LE

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ACTION: Learn to look in your blind spot.