

INTRODUCTION

I cannot be less than the most I can be, otherwise I would be spitting at God. If I've been given this much talent and this much intelligence, then I'm obliged to use it.

MAYA ANGELOU

A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!

D.H. LAWRENCE

HOW LIFE QUESTIONS GET RAISED

Authentic leaders have always tangled with the key questions of life and rendered their own answers in the integrity of their own being as they have confronted the situations that life has placed them in. Those who have not heard life's questions tend to be lost, emotionally numb, and vocationally unengaged. Part of a leader's authenticity is the willingness to engage daily in dialogue with the events and situations life throws at us.

When I was growing up in Australia, my parents lost a lot of money in the great depression, so in 1936 we sold our hotel in Sydney and made the car trip to a little seaside town in New South Wales. They leased a small hotel right by the water. I lived a halcyon life, swimming, surfing, bicycling. In the school holidays, hotel guests who were friends of the family took me fishing up the river, or surfing. Life seemed to be a breeze. One day at the end of fourth grade, when we were spinning our wheels in class after

annual exams were over, Sister Emmanuel got us started making a scrapbook. My first page was silly. I put in a full page ad for toothpaste. The next day was the attack on Pearl Harbour. So, my second page had the classic shot of US warships ablaze on battleship row. I filled up the scrapbook and five more with the history of World War II.

One day these two worlds—my carefree life by the seaside and the war—came together for me. I was down on the bayside beach near our hotel, when I noticed a launch approaching. It stopped just a few feet from where I was building sand castles. Five men were taken out of the launch. I saw that they were covered in oil and badly burnt. A butter ship had been torpedoed just a few miles off shore by a Japanese submarine, and these were the survivors. They were temporarily made at home in the lobby of our hotel until an ambulance could come.

The sight of those terribly burned men brought the suffering of war home to me in a way that none of the Movietone newsreels, or war movies could. Perhaps, in retrospect, I began wondering how these two worlds—terrible suffering, and days without care—could exist side by side.

The next day my father got me out of bed, and said, "We're going to pick up some butter." But butter was rationed. Where were we going to get butter from? As our truck made its way out along the southern beaches, I was told that the butter ship's cargo was washing up all along the shores. Boxes of butter lay everywhere. We joined the townsfolk who were strung along the beach salvaging the butter crates among the seaweed. We stacked crate after crate of butter in the truck, and then went back for more to stock our hotel freezer. The hotel dining room, to guests' amazement, had butter on the table all through the war. But at the time I was stunned—a ship gets torpedoed, and we get butter! How can disaster and suffering live side by side with such possibility?

Well, my days of not a care in the world quickly came to an end as all the young men in the town went off to war. It was impossible to hire male help.

At ten, I became my dad's "right-hand man", filling up quarts of "draught" from the firkins (nine gallon barrels) and kilderkins (18-gallon barrels), sweeping out the bar every morning, working side by side with him for the "victory [vegetable] garden" in our back yard. I had joined the working class.

In the back of my mind, a question was forming, something like, Is life really like this? A roller coaster ride with terrible suffering and mysterious boons? I think for the next thirty years I struggled with those questions. What was the relationship between the religion I was taught in Catholic school and real life? How could life contain such opposite experiences? Which part of life was real? Was it the halcyon days of not a care in the world, or the godawful suffering and hard work associated with "the War". I think it would be bizarre to suggest that at age ten or eleven I was mature enough to ask these

questions. But I do believe that life raised them, and I felt them, willy nilly.

Of course, there were other struggles, too. My dad and I were always at loggerheads about how much free time I should get. I always wanted more; but, with so much work to do, he figured there was less. Sometimes I just sneaked away to hang out with the “Kenny gang”, as we called ourselves, to go out on the bay in aircraft drop tanks, to ride ponies, or to throw rocks at the public school kids. So, how much work was fair for me to do?

Later, when I thought that I had solved my life questions by joining a religious order, these childhood questions were only exacerbated. We delved into tomes on moral theology, ascetical theology, church history, hagiography, until we knew all the big words, with not an idea in the world of how they applied to everyday life. As I passed through the training and began teaching religion in a Catholic school, I noticed the sheer boredom of the kids when there was talk of “transubstantiation”, “the hypostatic union”, “the beatific vision”. After a while, in desperation at not being able to make any sense of it, or apply it to life, we would start talking about “practical issues”: social issues, work, getting a job, dating, euthanasia, and so on. Much more interest in all that. But still there was no connection between the theological big words and real life.

I began going to conferences to look for clues there. I went to meetings of the Society which studied the works of Roman Catholic theological heavyweight, Thomas Aquinas. At every one of these Aquinas Society meetings at Sydney University, the same man got up and said something like: “Søren Kierkegaard presents a totally different theological approach to life. We should be hearing what he has to say.” (Søren Kierkegaard was a 19th century philosopher-theologian from Denmark—the first of the existentialists, who, among other things, posited faith as an alternative to existential despair.) After this man spoke, all hell would break loose. I did not have enough background at the time to really understand what was going on. But that Kierkegaardian knew that the study of Thomas Aquinas without any grounding in real life was pure abstraction, however valuable.

It is strange that for every new piece of technology, we get a manual on how to use it. Except for humans. We come into this world to face the puzzles of existence without any manual called, *How to Be a Human Being*. If we buy a car, computer, refrigerator, or even a digital watch, we get a manual of operations. But no one passes out instructions when we are born, not to us or our parents. Later on in life we may encounter the Bible, the Koran, the Eightfold Path, or Bill Bones’ *Pathways on Life’s Journey*. But, without good teachers who know how to use these great books, they often remain impenetrable, sometimes a source of one more fundamentalism.

Yet, everyone needs a big picture of the way life is, a good map to navigate the rapids of life and skills for the journey. For life initially comes to us as “one great big

buzzing confusion”, as the psychologist William James put it. Later on, as we get more scientifically literate, we may refer to it grandly as “chaos dynamics”. Or, more simply, as the Latin American author Ortega y Gasset put it: “Life comes to us as pure problem.” Not whether to order a steak or a salad for lunch, not just the practical daily problems associated with the workplace or the family or spouse or kids, not just a few ethical problems, like whether to divorce or not, to abort or not. But pure problem: Why am I here at all? Who am I? What do I do with my life? Or, how do I style my existence in the world? These questions never go away.

So I started reading like one possessed, but found nothing that helped relate theology to real life. At one stage, it seemed that Vatican II was going to be the answer, but the conservative forces won out and, except for a few victories, the glow of Vatican II died. We were left with the same old disrelation to real life. Finally, the time came when I left the religious order, joined the peace movement, began raising hell in the press about the Catholic Church’s abuse of authority, its approach to birth control, its radical conservatism and much more. I was going deeper and deeper into despair.

One day, a woman by the name of Carol Pierce called from the Ecumenical Institute in Sydney and invited me to attend a course. I said I couldn’t bear one more course. Half an hour later, she called again and with the same schpiel. I declined. Half an hour later she called a third time, and went through it all again. I said to myself: “This is some woman, and she doesn’t take no for an answer.” I couldn’t find it in myself to say no again. Carol and her husband, Joe Pierce, taught the course about what life was really like in the 20th century and what its possibilities were, and it was right up my alley. That course, experienced and lived for the next 30 years actually forms the basis of Chapters 2, 3, 9, and 10 of this book.

The course solved none of my life struggles for good; in a sense, it raised more questions than it answered, but it was a new set of questions that set me on a journey of discovery, and gave me names and handles for things.

As you read, you may want to reflect back on your life as I have done above to see where the big life questions were first raised for you. These questions arise many times in the course of a lifetime, but the answers do not all pop out neatly in one place. These days, the questions seem to turn up early in people’s lives; for example, those youth who graduate from university with a bachelor’s degree, or even a doctorate, and can’t find work related to their training.

So how do we enable young, middle-aged or older people to face up to the three fundamental questions of life:

1. *Who am I?* (What is a human being? Who am I as Mary, Vikash or Vincente? Who am I really?)

When life picks me up in its wave, and then dumps me on the beach so that my head burrows a hole in the sand, it raises the question, who am I? Do I rejoice at those ups and downs because that's how life is? Do I give up surfing the waves of life just because I got dumped? Has this experience enlarged me or diminished me? Am I a lover or hater of life? And then the big one: how do I relate to the fact that I am going to die?

2. *What do I do?* Why was I born? Why am I in the world? What is my life about? What is my vocation in life? What do I want to do with my once-around-the clock life? How can I make a difference to the world and its social structures?

For many of us this question was raised when we left the regular structures of school life, and attended our ceremony of graduation. Suddenly we realized that the next years of our lives seemed like a yawning abyss. In our own ways, each of us faced our life opening before us. If my life is to have structure or purpose, it is up to me to create it. So what am I going to do with the whole rest of my life?

3. *How do I style my life?* How am I going to live my life? How do I style myself as a human being? How do I be who I am to the fullest? How do I relate myself to myself to others and to the depths of my being? How do I live fully in whatever situation I find myself?

When my mood hits rock bottom as I encounter life's vicissitudes and soars like a rocket when life is good to me, I am experiencing something quite normal. As I face life's questions, I have the opportunity to develop a constancy, a centeredness in my relationship to life. I create what it means for me to be a leader in the real situations I face.

We all have to tangle with these questions as we live. But it is not so easy. In fact, any time we are confronted with one of these questions, as we shall see in chapter 2, our response is generally some kind of paralysis.

LEADERSHIP AND PARALYSIS

The title of this book attempts to join two ideas. First, there is an overwhelming radicality to the stance of living a full human life. Second, we don't need to be paralysed by all the issues and questions in our lives. We can begin to deal with them as social innovators in our own household, around the kitchen table, at the coffee klatch, round the water cooler, wherever we are. We don't need to put up barricades and start a revolution. We can lead by instigating small changes wherever we are—once we deal with the paralysis bugaboo.

There are times in everyone's life, when we feel that something overwhelmingly different is demanded of us. It is as if life is a great marriage feast to which we are invited. Something in us wants us to say, "yes, yes, I want to participate." Maybe we wake up

in the middle of the night and experience a sudden yearning for something different—to go on a great adventure; to get involved in our local community; to give up the rat race for one weekend and go on retreat; to abandon our career as hotshot market trader and go work in Central American villages for a year and see what happens. But the possibility leaves us paralysed: we start coming out with our excuses. There is an old gospel song about it:

I cannot come, I cannot come to the wedding,
 I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow,
 I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum.
 Pray hold me excused, I cannot come.

The concern of this book is that people do not seem to be aware of their own ability to act. From time to time they wake up to their freedom to make choices and take charge of life's meaning. They experience an overwhelming drive to do something, try something, but they are paralysed. This book challenges people to take charge of their own internal quest for meaning in life. It encourages them to move out of paralysis by acting powerfully wherever they are.

In that great old movie *Auntie Mame*, there is a scene in which the heroine has invited some guests to a feast in her house. The guests are standing round listlessly, not partaking of anything, when Mame begins her walk down the grand staircase to meet them. Suddenly she pauses on the stairs to look down at the scene below. Moved by a sudden inspiration, she yells out to them: "Life is a banquet, and all of you poor suckers are starving to death!"

All of us, at times, have this experience. We are invited to a banquet, and yet our own paralysis and indecision has afflicted us with spiritual anorexia. Underneath this is a sense that someone else is in charge of our future—not we ourselves. Richard Critchfield wrote a great book on village development in the early 1980s. In it he says,

The great divide in the world today is not so much between the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the healthy and malnourished, but between those who think that humans can shape their own destiny and those who still believe that personal fate is decided by outside forces.

This paralysis is nowhere more obvious than when we come up against social issues. Someone dumps their garbage in a vacant lot, or toxic chemicals in the creek. "Someone should do something about that!" Mrs Jones is housebound and can't get out anymore. "Her relatives should attend to that!" There are accidents on this particular cor-

ner every month. “They should put up traffic lights.”

Our paralysis always seems to invoke some other party as the one responsible: the government, relatives, other people in the community. Yet the issues mentioned here are not major issues. But we seem to grow faint at the very thought of intervening, of doing something, anything at all, to deal with the problems. No wonder that when we come into contact with the big ones, for example, when the global economy dominates over national governments (as in the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investments Treaty (MAI) issue, or the poor quality of education, or inequities in the health care system, or youth gangs, or the void of meaning in people’s lives, we all start running for cover.

Sometimes we feel the same paralysis ourselves. We all reach points in our lives when we get so flustered, rushed, overwhelmed by everything that’s coming at us, that we say to ourselves, “I need to stop, go aside, and think about what’s going on in my life, and decide how I can deal with all this complexity.” But, no, we are afraid to stop, because we think, if we do, everything will only get worse. If we leave the office or workplace to itself for a few days, the sky will fall in. We are paralysed by the very need to reflect, we do nothing about it, and our stress level continues to rise. Or we reach a certain momentum in our work: we are working fourteen hours a day, leaving our partner and the kids to fend for themselves. Our work has become everything. People expect us to keep producing at this pace, and we like the kudos we’re getting. We know we’re headed for a heart attack or stroke or something, but we are addicted to work, and life rushes by us. We are too busy to see those moments when life turns transparent and the awe breaks through. Work has become the meaning of our life. What we hoped to accomplish for society in that work has been forgotten.

We are all subject to this paralysis in our own ways. We know its name, and how it feels. We are in charge of our own lives, we can pick up responsibility and deal creatively with issues from our own standing point.

OUR SOURCE: LIVED EXPERIENCE

On leafing through this book, you may ask where all this content comes from? This book relies heavily on many of the foundational understandings behind the work of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) spread over nearly 40 years. The author, Brian Stanfield, is really a figurehead representing the people who worked as staff or volunteers with ICA over the years in its work of social pioneering on several continents.

You will find ideas in this book that are unfamiliar, and parts of it may be difficult to handle. Some of the language with tendencies to jargon may irritate you. But the content of this book come from lived experience, from forty years of programming in cities, towns,

communities and tribal villages on every continent, with all age groups and every sector of society. This broad base of experience gives a certain authenticity to the book. Even beyond the track record, ICA staff have done their homework on the dynamics of social change and the depths of the human spirit. (See Appendix for more on the history of ICA)

The heart of this book is life experience and the constant dialogue with life itself. My colleagues and I believe that life prepares us for leadership by plunging us into many different kinds of experience that raise foundational questions for us. Often, life questions appear long before we have the resources to come to terms with them. The test of this book for you is this: is this book talking about my real life experience? Is it talking about the way life is?

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

1. The original impetus for writing this book was to satisfy the curiosity of those who, having taken ICA's courses or participated in its consultations, sensed something deeper below the surface. Many recent course grads have had the impression of something more profound behind the technologies of participation (ToP™ methods). They pestered their teachers to pull back the curtain. This book is written for them.

2. We also think the book has a much wider application for those who are concerned about living fully wherever they show up in the social framework. This book can be useful to teachers, mothers, CEOs, and professional people, as well as to social entrepreneurs, community development practitioners and social change agents.

This is a book that ties together life's knowing, doing and being. It attempts to lay out a picture of unmitigated human living and courageous leadership. It is about how we care in our homes and neighborhoods, and for ourselves and for the world. It looks at how we find purpose in life. It is about clambering onto the stage of history and deciding to take responsibility for things from where we are. It's about caring for society in a way that beckons to other people.

WHAT IS A STANCE?

This book presents these foundational understandings by describing twelve stances. The dictionary defines stance as a way of standing, especially the way one places one's feet in certain sports. So there is a fencing stance, the stance of the batter, the wrestler, the archer, and so on. These stances are readily recognizable. But what about the stance of being a social pioneer? a social entrepreneur, a change agent? There is a lot more to those stances than where you place your feet and arms although when it comes to

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implementation, feet and arms are relevant. A stance is the way we present our deepest convictions through a style of being that integrates the knowing, doing and being of our lives. A stance shows a particular perspective on life. It represents a conscious choice about how we will live our lives.

When we talk about stance, we don't mean social posturing—presenting ourselves as more than we are. We don't mean charisma or chutzpah or dramatic poses to win admiration. We mean a deep inner conviction about life that manifests itself externally. So, for example, the stance of care derives from the belief that the life of the leader has to do, in the first instance, with care for other people rather than absorption with oneself. It manifests itself in expressions of concern for others—words, gestures, actions. A stance involves a basic decision about the direction of life and one's mental preoccupations. A stance is an inner posture manifested externally in how we live.

This book deals with twelve such stances. Three are about our relationship to life as a whole, three about our relation with ourselves, three about our relation with the world, and three about our relation to society.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There is no law that you have to start a book at the beginning and proceed right to the end. You may want to try another approach.

- All twelve stances express important dimensions of living with integrity. You might want to read the introduction and then the introductions to each of the four sections and then decide which section really captures your attention. Then plow in wherever your attention is grabbed.
 - To focus more on the “*Who am I?*” question, look at chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, and 9.
 - To examine “*What do I?*” questions, read chapters 6, 8, 10, and 11.
 - To explore “*How be I?*” questions, Chapters 1, 3, and 12 would be of interest.
- You could scan the book quickly, then read each chapter in depth. When you finish each chapter, do the exercise provided or answer the reflective questions.
- If you're the kind of reader who's not even going to look at the content before you've seen its intellectual pedigree, then read the Introduction and Appendix on the history of ICA.

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Exercise

You can use this exercise to decide intentionally how to use this book:

1. Run your eyes down the table of contents. Mark the chapters that look interesting.

2. Which chapters are you least interested in?

3. Which chapters do you really think you most need to read in terms of your current situation?

4. In the light of your answers, write down the order in which you want to read the chapters, beginning with the introduction.

5. Write this order of chapter numbers to serve as a reminder on something you can use as a bookmark.

6. What do you intend to do about the exercises at the end of each chapter?

- Deal with them as they come up?
- Do them all on a weekend retreat?
- Pick out the ones you need to do most and do them first?
- Invite a group to which you belong to do the exercises together?
- Tackle the exercises after you have read the whole book?

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