

## A Leadership Opportunity

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### A Conversation with Fred Kofman

RV: Fred, it's great to have a chance to talk with you. What are you up to these days?

FK: I've just finished putting together a financing deal for a new company called Axialent. I will be the President and my partner, Andy Freire, will be the CEO. We're creating an international company that will be working with corporate clients on a world-wide basis and developing an integral perspective on leadership, teamwork and personal effectiveness. I just finished creating the company after almost nine months of negotiations. It really feels like a birth.

RV: Sounds like it might. Is there a story behind the name?

FK: Yes. Axia, means value in Greek. It's about something that is valuable and worthy, not only in terms of ethics but also in terms of economics. "Lent" is the last syllable of excellent. Thus, there is a combination of values and effectiveness or excellence. We merge the drive for effectiveness with consciousness and awareness.

RV: Wonderful. It sounds like this company is the next step on a series of steps you've been taking. I was first aware of your work when you were at MIT, working with Peter Senge. Later you developed your interest in Ken Wilber's work. Tell us a little bit about that journey.

FK: Both Peter Senge and Ken Wilber are on the Advisory Board of Axialent. Peter is going to be our main resource on

development of the corporate programs. Ken is our main advisor on the development of personal development programs. So Axialent is the next step on the long evolutionary adventure that I has been my life.

I met Peter Senge at MIT in a very circuitous and fortunate way. I was teaching accounting. I saw Peter's book and then connected with him. We really hit it off and started working together. Later, MIT became too constraining for me and I left. I maintained the relationship with Peter; he is one of my best friends and mentors. I started up my company, Leading Learning Communities.

That company fulfilled its purpose. It really was a great adventure that enabled me to go to the world and offer some of the things I had put together combining the work of Peter and many others. I find that there is so much wisdom in the field that it is a significant contribution to package, synthesize and develop it in ways that fit the needs of specific clients. I'm hard pressed to claim too much originality. We are all developing this field now in an almost transpersonal way.

I did that work and was quite successful and very happy. At some point I confronted the limits of my own personal ability to manage. I see myself as a teacher more than a CEO or a general manager of the corporation. I don't think I'm terrible at managing, but it is not really my passion. So when Andy Freire showed up, things changed.

Andy told me he had been a CEO in Argentina for many years and was interested in doing something around leadership. He had heard that I had been working with Ken Wilber and he was very excited about that work. We started talking. He had access to financing and we put together this company. We agreed to a division of labor. He is much better than I in managing and I'm much better than he in teaching. So I teach and he manages, and everybody is happy.

RV: What was the nature of the bridge between the work you were doing at MIT with Peter Senge and connection with Ken Wilber?

FK: When I was at MIT I didn't know about Ken. This is a funny story. I kept seeing all of these books by Ken Wilber. I kept thinking that this guy must be like a trashy novelist. Nobody can write so many books so fast and produce good material, so I was sure that he was the type that must like to rehash the same idea over and over again. Nobody could write so much and be good at it.

Once, I was stuck in an airport with nothing to read, so I walked into a bookstore. They had a book by Ken Wilber so I said I guess this is the time when I'm going to read one of his terrible books.

RV: Which one was it?

FK: It was Eye of the Spirit, which is not what I would recommend people to start with because it is kind of smack in the middle of his work and assumes a lot of previous knowledge. I just bought it and I started reading it. I remember I had an epiphany, "This guy is really good! I mean, this book is really deep! It is nothing like I thought it was there in the New Age section of the bookstore. I discovered that he was very deep, very profound and I developed a great admiration for him.

RV: What was it about his work that really grabbed you?

FK: I think it was the span and the depth. His span showed up in all of the areas where he seemed to have something very intelligent to say. This included his analysis of literature, history, spirituality, psychology and anthropology. It was fascinating. Not only his interests were vast, they were also unified. I could see a common theme behind every one of his ideas: the love and freedom of the radiance that appears as what is, as he describes in Sex, Ecology and Spirituality.

Just inferring the grand model that this man must have had in his head to create these books was very intellectually appealing to me. It also was, for some reason, touching me emotionally. I can't describe why, but there is a beauty in the concepts and the wisdom that I came to see which touched my soul.

I have done a lot of work with Peter Senge on a practical level. He is masterful. But when I was working with Peter I didn't have an experience of those around Peter and me having a depth of grounding in a very philosophically congruent way. We were working on the surface of profound spiritual and philosophical principles, but those principles were implicit, rather than explicit in our work.

When I saw Ken's work I was very taken by it, and I wanted to meet him. But I was deterred by his reputation. I had heard that this guy was like a monk. This was disappointing. For several years I just held my admiration and just read his books while trying to learn as much as possible. I was not sure how to integrate this into the work that I had been doing, so I just kept doing it for the sake of my own personal development

Then, I decided to move to Colorado. I just wanted sunny weather, to be near the mountains and have a good airport. Colorado is the only place in the Central US that fulfills these requirements. In Boulder I began doing some volunteer work for Naropa University. There I crossed paths with a lady who became Ken's wife. When I saw her she was talking to John Cobb, the President of Naropa University and who was the person I was working with. He called me over and introduced me to her. He asked me for some help with his senior staff at Naropa and I said that I'll do this for you if you introduce me to Ken Wilber.

I knew John had a new Ken Wilber manuscript. Anybody to whom Ken would send a manuscript saying, "I would appreciate your comments" had to have a relationship with him. So John sent an email to Ken indicating that I wanted to meet him.

When I met him Ken he shocked me. He shattered my image of him because he was incredibly pleasant and warm. I mean, I've read some of the critiques that he has written about other people. The guy has a very sharp pen. I always think: I never want to be on the wrong end of his pen.

He was so friendly and warm and he has always been like

that. I have known him for a little more than two years and it's been fabulous. It's been a permanent, constant joy and a source of learning. I hesitate to say that he is my friend but I love him dearly and he, for some reason, must find me amusing because he invites me often to visit. And he's agreed to be an advisor to Axialent and to work with us in developing our personal development programs. I feel honored by our relationship.

RV: Clearly his work has influenced yours and you've built on it. Would you sketch out how you see that?

FK: In terms of the business world, one of the problems that I see is that people take a very technical approach to problems. Most people who have decision making power are much more developed in their cognitive line, so to speak, than in their emotional, interpersonal or spiritual lines. Working from the cognitive aspect feels very comfortable for tackling problems that are formalizable. These tend to be scientific approaches that are very powerful to deal with things .

When you have to deal with problems that involve (unconscious) things, the scientific approach is very effective. For many years the tools of total quality management, process reengineering and others that have a scientific or statistical basis really made a huge difference. However there's a large set of problems that involve, not only the technical aspect -- unconscious things, but also conscious things like human beings. We have the machine but we also have the machine operator. S/he, in addition to performing technical tasks has thoughts, feelings and motivations, fears and concerns, that whole interior world. And the problem usually does not only rest on him or her as an individual but also involves the group of machine operators, with their bosses, the supervisors and their managers and the whole staff of the plant. They form a little community.

A technical approach that focuses on the machine as in a time and motion study is -- as Ken would say -- right in part; but is also wrong in forgetting a significant part of the problem. So I found that Ken's perspective was a very good philosophical model to justify what I had been doing with

Peter. There I was focusing on personal mastery and the consciousness of the individual involved, his/her feelings, his/her ability to communicate, to resolve problems by sharing meaning. Not communication in the computer-type sense of hearing the word that I say to convey information to you, but communication where an I and a Thou are creating and sharing meaning. By doing that, we are also providing meaning for our lives. I had been doing that from the early days, but I did not have a philosophical infrastructure to ground it and to argue for it in a sound philosophical way. That solid philosophical foundation is what I found in Ken's integral model.

RV: One of the things that becomes apparent in your work, and it shows up in the set of tapes that you have put out, Conscious Business, and also in your article, "Business-sattva: The Business Bodhisattva," is a very strong spiritual dimension in your approach to your work and your life.

FK: I find myself attracted to people and institutions that have a strong commitment to express transcendence in ordinariness. Right now in my work I cover all the bases because I'm Jewish, so that's my own heritage. I work with two Universities: one is Naropa which is a Buddhist university, and the other is Notre Dame, which is a Catholic university.

RV: With Leo Burke at Notre Dame?

FK: Right. I teach a leadership program in the Integral Executive Program with Leo.

My choice is to include all the perspectives.

RV: Get all the bases covered?

FK: Right. You never know. It's portfolio diversification. At the final judgment I can always pull out my C.V. and point to the part that becomes relevant depending on who I find there.

Regardless of the specific tradition there is a common theme

that I find in all the spiritual work that attracts me: the unconditional love for the sacredness of what is. . I find myself aligned with people who have roots that go very deep into these spiritual concerns or these transcendent realities—regardless of whether they are Jewish, Catholic, Buddhist, Sufi, or whatever. And who want to extend or bring those roots all the way to a practical current reality.

To say that someone is spiritual is a bit of a misnomer, because we're all spiritual. We are all Spirit. It's like saying, "Your work is very human," or "You're very human." We use human as meaning some form of tenderness, open heartedness or warmth. If you look at the literal meaning of the word, you don't have a choice. You are human. Even if you are a horrible human being, you are still human. There's nothing you can do that would strip you of humanity; you can't lose your official status of human.

In the same sense, I don't believe you can lose your official status of Spirit presencing, because that's what everything is. Some waves are big, some waves are small, but there is no wave that is not water. So the wave is not the thing, but the movement in the medium. That's the way I experience reality.

I believe we exist in a spiritual medium that moves up and down in waves –in fact, we ARE waves ourselves! Our ordinary mind, with its constrained perspective makes us call these waves "things" or "selves": like separate things, like Fred talking to Russ, or there's a mountain called Everest and another mountain, Aconcagua. But it's craziness to see the mountain and deny that it's a folding of the earth. The same earth that rises as Everest, rises also as Aconcagua. Of course, these two Earth-Waves are different, but they are the same Earth. We are all preciously unique individuals, but we're also manifestations of that same precious medium. Paraphrasing Mary Oliver, each one of us is as unique and as common as a field daisy.

I don't know if you can call that a spiritual approach. We all have feet, but some of us are aware of our feet and some of us spend our lives looking for them. It makes no difference: clueless or aware, both have the same feet. My work is an

attempt not to give feet to people. I don't invite anybody to be spiritual. It's more about just standing on them. Stop looking for your feet and start walking mindfully. Your presence is unconditional. It can manifest in a very powerful and great new way, when you are conscious of what you do. Or you can be living in an aimless drift, as an accident of unconsciousness.

RV: There has been in recent years more and more literature about the importance of spirit in business, and one of the things about Conscious Business that really impressed me was your ability to take these elements of spirit, these elements of a more holistic perspective on work and on business and express them in terms that were really grounded in the experience of people in business. One of the most beautiful examples of that is when you talk about awareness and state that it is the single most important business skill. Please comment on that.

FK: The first question when you are doing anything in life is, "What's the point?" That is a very spiritual question. What are you doing with your one and precious life? You've been given a gift of consciousness and wisdom and now you have this resource for a fairly limited time. What are you going to do with it?

In business you start from the same place. We ask, "What are you doing? What is the point of what you are doing? What are you trying to accomplish? Why is that important to you?" At the same time, to accomplish something in business, unless you want to be a criminal, you have to also value what would further the purpose of other people's lives. That's how you are going to get them to buy your product or service: by giving them something that they find valuable. The source of value is that it is congruent with their life's purpose.

Becoming aware of what is meaningful to you and what is meaningful to those around you is the beginning of every successful enterprise. The moment you lose touch with that you are going to go down in flames. Maybe the words are too spiritual, but this is like basic Business 101. What's your value proposition? Why would anybody want to buy your

product or service?

You have to think about that in a fairly specific way, because it is not that you think that your product is great. That's not going to make your business successful. Your customers have to think it's great. So you have to empathize with your customers; you have to become aware not only of what's meaningful to you but what's meaningful to them.

To experience them as conscious beings that have a purpose in life and define values that further that purpose in life is really a trans-personal exercise. It sounds mystical when I say it this way. I don't use this language in companies. I just say, "Let's look at your value proposition and what you think your customers would find valuable in it Do you know your customers? Why do you feel good about offering this to your customers? How does this align with your life and your concerns? How does it align with theirs?"

By engaging in that discussion people develop a passion for what they do. Once the passion is there then you have a question about skillful means. But the technical question, the question of skillful means, (how do you communicate, how do you resolve conflicts, how do you coordinate these actions, how do you do all these things?) becomes relevant only when it's prompted by your passionate commitment to a larger purpose. You don't start teaching people tools without the previous investigation that takes you out of yourself and recontextualizes yourself as serving something that is bigger than just yourself.

Without that recontextualization, technique is really boring. It's like saying, buy a sex manual and sit down to study technique. If there's no love, no technique in the world is going to create an intimate relationship. I think that business is really an act of love. It's different than the intimacy of a couple, but it's a kind of love that supports the opening of other people to find themselves as conscious beings in the world.

RV: Agape rather than Eros?

FK: Well, it's both. It's Eros in the reaching for the ultimate purpose. And it is Agape, bringing down that consciousness, that fire that you have achieved by connecting with that ultimate purpose, and using it to embrace the world and to manifest that energy for freedom in the fullness of manifestation. Those are the two paths that Ken talks about: the ascending path, which tends to be the more masculine desire to be free, to exit the constraints of the world and the more feminine part, which is the descending path into fullness, into the radiance of being. I think the joining of those two parts and the stretching to reach for the fire and for the energy above and embodying that energy in the fullness of the world is really what every fully conscious human being is about

Everybody is "in business." You cannot live without being in business. You may be an employee, a small business owner, a corporate executive, a massage therapist, a nurse, or you may be cleaning houses. Whatever you're doing, part of your being in this world, is being in the domain of work. You have intimacy in the private sphere and work in the public one. Your intimate transactions are related to sex, and occur in a rather small community, well it depends on what kind of love life you have, but they are usually in a couple or with a small number of partners. But then you have these other transactions, the public ones. They involve the money aspect of your life, giving value to others and receiving value in exchange, as a way to sustain yourself materially, energetically and spiritually.

Sex and money, or intimacy and power, or union and creativity, or communion and agency, are essential aspects of life, as are yin and yang, masculine and feminine, love and freedom. Thanks to Ken, I've met David Deida this year. David is the wisest person I've met in the area of sexuality as a manifestation of spirituality. My conversations with him have made me aware of the beautiful symmetries that exist between sexual value, (sexual attraction, sexiness) and market value (market attractiveness, marketability).

RV: This has bearing on the notion of leadership in business. Do you have a definition of the role of leadership in business?

FK: I'm sure I have many...

RV: Do you have a favorite definition?

FK: Yes. It changes with the situation. I can tell you the one that may feel appealing to me right now, but I don't have one that I would use all the time. Although there's a core and it's always there, the way the core is expressed depends on what I feel the situation is calling for in me. At this moment, I feel like saying that a leader is somebody that can help people align their transcendent individual purposes into a transcendent collective purpose.

RV: What is integral leadership?

FK: Building on the previous definition, an integral leader is one that would do that in, as Ken would say, an AQAL form, meaning in all the quadrants, at all levels of development, engaging all the different lines of personal consciousness, and considering the two tendencies of holons -- agency and communion or the masculine and the feminine, and also involving the multiple of the three states, the gross, the subtle and the causal. So an integral leader is a person that can resonate very powerfully with all the individuals around and has the skill to touch everybody wherever they are and then with that touch awaken in them the passion for creating something that transcends each one of them but involves the community.

RV: Do you have a specific model of leadership that you work from?

FK: I use Ken's model, I use the four quadrants and the idea of the exterior and interior dimensions. The exterior of leadership is behaviors. Also, a leader is like the builder or the architect of the ship in developing the social and business systems of the company. In the interior dimension the leader works in a transformational way, touching people's personality and their interiority. As a cultural icon the leader influences the stories and the shared values and the community.

That is the basic model of leadership that I operate with. However I don't really talk about it too much because I

consider that the words are like a hiding place. When people talk a lot about leadership it becomes a subject out there. It becomes a theoretical subject to be discussed as opposed to an experience to be lived. So I focus my work much more in the nitty-gritty practices of leadership, for example, how to be a manifestation of unconditional responsibility, an exemplar of authenticity and integrity.

If you are in the masculine, more agentic mode of Eros, leadership represents the search for freedom or the desire to manifest freedom and power in the world. In this case, being unconditionally responsible is not something you talk about or you give lectures on. It is something you do in your life moment by moment. You are expressing moment by moment that ultimate freedom regardless of the constraints that the circumstances might impose. Freedom doesn't mean lack of constraint. Freedom means that you are so committed to your purpose that you are free even if you die. That nothing is going to make you diverge from your purpose.

That's the ultimate freedom. That is the ultimate love. You are leading your life and nobody else has the power to stop you from living your life as it is to be lived. That's an example. That's something that you as a leader do and then other people around just get influenced by it. Your presence is like a strong gravitational field that organizes the Kosmos with "K," as Ken uses it to describe the universe of meanings around you.

If you are in the feminine, more communion mode of Agape, leadership represents the loving blessing of radiance and connection. If you're in the feminine fullness, your unconditional responsibility is that you're going to hold the consciousness of the unity. You will maintain an openhearted relationship regardless of what the other person does. You are going to be fully in that awareness of connection even when someone is killing you. You are unconditionally present. Nobody can stop you. So that's again a more feminine unconditional response of a leader who can stand there and feel the connection to the other people and to the world and to what's occurring in the situation and she or he would not be swayed. Love does not mean lack of blocks to relationship. Love means that you are one with your beloved;

you ARE the Beloved, always and forever.

When you can embody these two notions of unconditional responsibility as unconditional freedom and unconditional love, and make them manifest through your being, that's much more leadership than talking about what does it mean to be a leader. And this is not something you only do in business. You must do it in your whole life.

I don't make such a big deal about leadership because people who don't have formal authority feel excluded: "This isn't about me," they think, "I am not a leader". I think there's a role for the distinction of leadership as the exercise of formal authority though. It involves leadership consultants, helping executives, people who have authority, to use that authority wisely. I respect and value that. I read their books and learn from them. But for me, leadership is a personal commitment to life. People with formal authority need to do that, but so does anybody who wants to be fully human.

RV: As I listened to you talk about leadership I was equating leadership with formal position authority. For me, in increasingly complex systems the notion of leadership can't be tied to a single role anymore. Leadership is a phenomenon that is shared more widely in the system, so when we're talking about leadership we're talking about both individuals and a system.

FK: I agree with you that thinking of leaders as only people with authority is dangerous, shortsighted and disempowering. That's why I don't like to talk too much about leadership. That word has been hijacked so to speak by the traditional notion that has appropriated the meaning of the word, and I don't share it.

RV: Like heroic leadership?

FK: Yes, exactly -- heroic leadership, functional power or position power, things like that. Now when you start thinking about leadership with other connotations or with other meanings, you have to tell people I am talking about a different kind of leadership, a distinction between heroic

leadership and more integral leadership. There is an attraction in that. Now talking about a system, I'm not sure what that means because for me leadership is inherently a human or an attribute of consciousness, a conscious empathy. And I don't see a system as the subject with localized consciousness.

RV: Let me see if I can offer a way of looking at that and get your response. What I was trying to suggest earlier is that with increasingly complex organizational systems, business systems, whether we're talking just in terms of size or geography or other measures of complexity, that it's increasingly difficult for one person to exercise leadership, that it is something that is shared, that there are leaders throughout the system.

FK: Oh, yes, absolutely.

RV: If that's the case and we think about the phenomenon of leadership within a business system, within a business organization, then there is some kind of system of leadership, that there's some kind of relationship among those that are performing leadership roles that could be characterized as having a culture and a system.

FK: Okay, I understand now. That makes a lot more sense. It's not that the system is leader, but this sense of interrelationships amongst the leaders that you call a system of leadership. That makes a lot more sense. In fact, I will agree with you 100% that as the level of complexity grows, it's impossible for any one person to hold that complexity and to manage it. In fact, that's why Leading Learning Communities, my old company, where I was a single leader, lost its appeal to me, and Axialent, where I share the leadership with Andy and all our general managers and principal consultants, became my new enterprise.

I do think that there's a role for a person to be a leader of a system. He or she won't be able to micro-lead everything. He or she will have to take a much broader approach, and say, "Okay, on these large strategic lines we're going to have an alignment and we're going to have a common vision, a

purpose and a way of operating together.” But then there will be a hierarchical system or a holarchical system to use more of Ken’s lexicon. In this system there would be a higher level of perspective of the whole.

The different parts of the subsystem will also have lower levels of leadership that are managing their own sub-system at the same time coordinating the functioning of that subsystem with the other subsystems that compose the system. So I think the areas of communication, conflict resolution and coordination of functions that I focus on, are very, very important because that’s where the rubber meets the road. That’s where people are able to come together and create something that’s bigger than any one of them.

RV: You wrote an article in relation to Wilber’s thinking, “Holons, Heaps and Artifacts, and Their Corresponding Hierarchies.” Has that been published anywhere?

FK: No. We just published it on the web at the World of Ken Wilber site. That created quite a bit of a stir. I feel bad because a lot of people sent me their comments and I wasn’t able to reply. I really wrote the paper summarizing my conversations with Ken as a kind of a service to the community.

I went to see Ken and I said, “Ken, what about this?” He said, “Yeah, you’re right. There’s something here that needs to be developed further.” Then people spent a lot of time and attention on the article. I think they came up with some wonderful ideas. It’s just that I’m not a philosopher and I have a business to run. I feel bad I didn’t respond, but I think I would have felt worse had I taken the time to respond and postponed my other priorities.

RV: If you’re willing I’d like to talk about some of these ideas and reflect on an approach to leadership that I’ve tried to articulate in the Integral Leadership Review and elsewhere. It might be helpful if we start by differentiating a social and an individual holon. That’s spelled out in the article and if I could have your permission I would like to place this article on my web site in the resource section.

FK: Oh, absolutely.

RV: I'm not going to ask you to summarize what is in it because people can go to the article and read that. One of the statements you make is that "dehumanizing consequences ensue from combining individual and social holons in the same holarchy." You give as an example the relationship between an individual and a team, and you offer several organizational examples. I'd like to run this other model by you for you to consider through your lens.

It begins with the idea that we were just talking about, that leadership is something that's shared in complex systems. And at least a place to begin to look at this is with executive leadership in an organization, at least beginning with the executive leadership in a system.

In the article, you offer examples. One is Sergeant Pepper's Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. I want to talk about that in relationship to the model that I was telling you about and referring to earlier. My image is that what would happen in any kind of generic situation is that you would have a group of people coming together around some shared purpose, whatever that purpose may be. In my early work in this we were often using the idea of the Elvis Presley Fan Club. They would get together and say we want to perpetuate the music of Elvis, and they'd come together around that.

The next step would be that they would have to find some way of putting together resources and describing roles and relationships, processes and structures to support them in doing that. They would form a leadership organization, if you will.

Then they would find that there are things going on that are at the level of complexity that they couldn't handle with formal organizational operations and they'd have to develop the capacity for team work. From that place of having developed some level of capacity for team work they would be able to engage more effectively with the stakeholders of the club, of the group that was originally formed.

The model suggests that at each level of development (and certainly these could be refined in more detail) there is a concomitant role for the individual leader. For example, there's membership in a group, a contributor to an organization, a player on a team, and so forth. If we can conceptualize leadership in a complex system with this kind of lens, including the internal and the external aspects of that, at the individual level we've got a framework that we can use to look at the phenomenon of leadership. We would recognize that development in each of these quadrants has all of the attributes that you've spelled out in the article and that is reflected in the work of Spiral Dynamics, the AQAL literature and the work that Ken has been doing with Don Beck, and so forth.

The thing I'm confused about or not clear about is by spelling it out that way am I simply mixing up individual and social holons? Am I throwing in artifacts? Or is this a useful way of at least representing an archetype, a developmental archetype of leadership in a complex system?

FK: I don't find any problem with this. Nothing of what you said irritates my sensibility. Let me tell you what would irritate me and what I was thinking when I wrote the article. This is my main concern. As long as you say membership you are distinguishing an individual holon from the social holon. You're not conflating those two hierarchies.

The problem is when you say the individual is a part of the team. This is not the same thing as saying the individual is a member of the team. That's what this discussion is all about. To be very graphic I'll use political examples. In a political situation you can have a system like the one that the founding fathers were trying to implement with the Constitution of the United States that says all men are created equal. They are inalienably free. They own themselves and their lives. Now individuals who are self-owners can choose to associate and create an organization of which they are members. When people affiliate they can create social entities in which they participate as members. But they are not a part of that organization.

On the other arm, I mean, hand, my arm is a part of my body. My arm is not a member of my body. There are no members because the arm doesn't have any individual agency. My arm doesn't operate by itself. It's not an entity with conscious volition. So the arm is a part of me and I, as an individual, have a different kind of control over my arm than the government can have on me.

But the moment you mix those two things you get into Mao killing 50 million people or Stalin saying it's okay to kill 30 million people, because they are like a gangrenous arm in the "social body". These people are a bad part of society and we need to cut off this part, because they're hurting the body. It would be like you cutting off your arm if you had gangrene. You wouldn't say that it was murder or a crime but that you — as owner of yourself — realized that a part of your body was harming you so you cut it off. But the moment you translate that to a social holon and say the family or the clan is the primary thing, the people are part of the clan and if you don't conform to the clan we're going to cut you off just like you would cut off a gangrened arm, that's when it gets very dangerous.

RV: You use the example again with the Sergeant Pepper's Friendly Heart Club Band of one of the participants in the Band who is developmentally challenged in some way. While all the other members go to orange, the person who is developmentally challenged is stuck in blue. The person stuck in blue is not truly a part of the larger team effort, because the others are operating at a higher level of consciousness and capacity than the person at blue. Have I interpreted that correctly?

FK: Several people challenged me on that, but that's not at all what I wanted to say. For example, in my family we're all members of the family, my wife and I and we have six children. The youngest is three; the oldest is 13. We're all members of the family and we're all equal members. Nobody is more a member than anybody else. We are all full members of the family. Nobody is part of the family because each one of us is an individual. The family is a social holon, so it does not have parts; the family has members, who are individuals affiliated in a system of social interaction and

shared meaning. Are we together so far?

RV: Absolutely.

FK: We are all equal members. However, when you look for the level of evolution of this family, at what level of consciousness this family operates when we're all together, if you're looking for the lowest common denominator it is my three year old daughter, Michelle. She is the one who is at the lowest stage of development. She's only three.

The common language we share as a family is the language of the three year old. If we all want to go to the movies together, we choose a movie that she can understand, that she can enjoy. We watch the movie, and we all enjoy it, too. It is probably not the movie we would go to see if she wasn't there.

My next daughter, Paloma, is eight. If my three-year-old daughter weren't there, we would probably choose a movie that an eight year old would understand and enjoy. Now that doesn't mean that my three year old is not a full member of the family. It just means that she participates in a social holon that operates at the level of development of a three year old, because she cannot participate at a higher level.

I have a ten-year old son who loves math. He always asks me "Dad, can you give me math problems?" When I'm talking with my son, Tomás, about math problems and we do a simple algebraic operation, my three year old is not a member of that system. She cannot be a participant of that social interaction, because it's beyond her grasp. That doesn't mean she's not a full member of the family. It just means that my math conversation with Tomás is totally going over her head and she can only participate in the lower band of conversations that reach up to a three year old. Above that, she cannot be a participant, although in all other aspects she is still a full member of the family.

The same thing with my wife: my wife and I are a subset of the family but we have a level of development and a kind of conversation that we engage and we affiliate around that is

ungraspable by our children. Now that doesn't mean our children are any less important or less loved or less members of the family. It just means they can operate as fully functioning members up to a certain level of consciousness according to their personal evolution. Am I making sense?

RV: Yes.

FK: Now let me go back to the Band. It is an organization and there you have a person who has achieved a certain stage of development below what other people have. This doesn't mean that this person is any less a member of the organization. It's not a handicap, even if he were a completely retarded person. That doesn't mean he cannot be loved and included and participate, just like if I have another baby, well our baby will still be a member of the family even though she couldn't even go to the movies. We truly include every person in our heart and our love, but that doesn't mean that we all are going to disregard that our baby, or our three year old, is at a lower level of development and she cannot participate in some conversations.

In a company or in a group some members may not be able to affiliate around a higher stage of development because it goes over their heads, given where they are in their lives right now. What I meant is that when you have a leader who has a high level of development, if that leader pretends to engage everybody at his or her level, she is going to lose the affiliation of a large part of the organization that perhaps is not able to function there. It would be like me trying to get my three year old to discuss Ken Wilber's model with me and, if she cannot discuss it, I said, "You're useless! Why do I want you in my family?" That would be so unkind, it would be horrible!

In a company, or a community –a social holon– compassion means understanding that not everybody is operating at your level, that some people cannot yet attain the depth of consciousness that you have the gift to hold at this point in your life. The compassionate thing to do is to relate to them in the most developmental way that you can think of or that you can feel in your heart, but not to push them into an area where there is no common denominator.

RV: This raises a question that I also try and address and you've talked about. That is alignment or attunement. In the holon essentially what we've got are four boxes, four categories. I'm less clear about how Ken or you talk about the relationships among the boxes. So for example, in the model that I've put together around integral leadership, I've talked about the relationship between the interior individual and the interior collective as one of alignment, or non-alignment as the case may be.

There is also a dynamic aligning process continually at work there in the relationship between the internal individual and external individual, beliefs and behaviors. In that relationship there is a self-management process that goes on. In the relationship between individual and collective behavior there is an engagement process. In order for the system to evolve over time all of those other processes must be going on. In your understanding of the integral approach is there a more effective way of thinking about development that links the quadrants rather than just what is interior to the quadrants?

FK: This has been one of the most obscure areas in Ken's work. It's not obscure because he hasn't explained it well. It's obscure because it's just a very tricky notion to grasp.

Let me give you a metaphor. Think of an object in three dimensions. Think of anything you can hold, like a telephone you're holding in your hand. Each object has height, width and depth. You can map the object in three-dimensional space and you can calculate these three dimensions. There is not necessarily a connection between height and width. Some objects are very long and very thin and some objects are short and thick, etc.

When you're talking about the holon, you're not really talking about four things or boxes that need to be connected; you're talking about one thing that is expressed and is manifest in four dimensions, just like the telephone, manifests in three dimensions. It's one thing that, depending on what axis you use to look at it, it's going to display a certain face. Does that make sense so far?

RV: Having a leadership group would be the whole but those other elements would be the parts of that whole. Is that not accurate?

FK: Let me talk first about the individual. That may be a little easier place to start. An individual has an interiority of certain thoughts and feelings. You can understand an individual or you can see an individual as a space of consciousness. The individual also has a body, a certain weight and physical characteristics, neurological connections in the brain, a skeleton and we can calculate weight and height and all those things.

RV: The biology, essentially?

FK: Yes, the biological constitution.

As to the individual you are looking at two dimensions. One could be the thoughts and feelings; the other could be the bodily structure. Now of course you could then ask what is the connection? What is the relationship between these two dimensions, because they're not completely independent?

If your brain goes haywire because we put some drugs in it, that's going to affect your interior experience. Or if you have certain thoughts, that could trigger reactions in the physical structure. If you get scared there would be hormones, like adrenaline and cortizon, which would be released into your bloodstream. Or vice versa. You can be injected with some hormones and then have the experience of fear. There is a link between them like one branch of the tree into another branch. It's the same tree; it's just that you're looking at it from two different perspectives.

Just like that you can see that any individual exists in a space of relationships. So it's not that two individuals need to get together to have a social holon. Every holon, by the great fact of being conscious exists in a relational space.

So for me, as an individual, it's not just that I have interiority as a person. I also exist in a space of shared meanings with my community and those have always been there for me. I

was born into that space just like I'm born into a reality that transcends me. I breathe and I get breast fed by my mother and all that, but I cannot survive physically by myself. I survive in a permanent interaction with the space around me as an open system. By the same token, my interiority is born in an already meaningful space. The self is always already swimming in a linguistic soup, a soup cooked by a community.

As a conscious being, I have a fourfold nature. I am individual and I am collective. I am interior and I am exterior. It's almost like an address. You have the street and the number. When you look at a holon you can locate that holon as a point in this four-dimensional space, as a four-dimensional vector, but it's only one entity. It's not four entities. And that's the problem of talking about a social holons as a group of people getting together. The social aspect of the holon is always already in a network of physical relationships, like I'm a member of a society and there are social rituals and practices for life, and I always exist in a network of meanings that my community shares.

RV: I'm trying to understand the implications of that. It seems to me that what you're saying is the holon is describing what is, but is not necessarily describing by itself any kind of change or developmental patterns. That you've got to move to the holarchy to do that.

FK: Exactly, but moving up the holarchy does not mean going from a person to a group. There are higher and higher levels of development of the person

RV: Is there a higher level holon than the person?

FK: No. A human being is the ultimate holon. The human being can hold within one body, our exterior structure, the whole evolution of consciousness up to the divine cosmic realization. There's nothing further that is necessary than an individual human being. The individual is at the top of a holarchy that goes all the way down to atoms. As Ken likes to say, from dust to Divinity.

It's actually very intricate. When I read *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* I think I understand it and find the whole holarchy deal a very appealing story. But then, I am never really sure that I really, really understand it. It took me many hours of conversation with Ken before I realized that my first, naive reading of his books had left unanswered many questions, left unfilled many conceptual holes. Ken's is a very delicate and very profound philosophical system, almost impossibly intricate. Every now I then, I go back to him and say, "Ken, tell me again what the hell are you talking about?" He is very patient and explains it to me again. And then I think, "Okay, now I get it." Then 2-3 days later I can't believe I was so crazy as to believe I got it. . I know what he told me but it doesn't make sense anymore. One of the mistakes that most people make about Ken's work is to over simplify the notion of the holon, to say, "Oh well. You have a holarchy and it's like having a radio and the radio is part of a stereo, which is part of a sound system, which is part of..."

RV: Those are artifacts.

FK: Exactly. Those are artifacts. Those are unconscious things, created by a conscious thing, but unconscious in themselves. And if you say you have the person and the person is part of the team and the team is part of the organization, it's a huge mistake. The person is not part of the team. The person is not part of anything. An individual human being is the highest holon.

RV: In the model I was presenting I think of it more as roles than I think about it as the person. It's the person when they're in that role but it's not the whole person.

I wonder if maybe we could shift just a little bit, because you talked about your work with Leo Burke, and it raises a very challenging question for us and that's the notion of development. What we've just been talking about has some implications for development. The whole area of spirit that you've talked about does, as well.

I think of development as fulfilling the potential that each of

us has. There's some evidence or suggestion from Graves and others' work that the number of levels of development that any individual can expect to be able to transcend in a lifetime is limited. I'm wondering if you, especially with your deep connection to spirit, could reflect on where you see the potential for development for business leaders or any of us?

FK: It's not very fruitful to confuse spirit and development. There are notions out there that if you work hard enough and you grow enough you will reach the ultimate level of development, which is Spirit. That is not entirely wrong, but it is not entirely right either.

Ken has a long discussion in Integral Psychology, about what is called spiritual. He distinguishes two notions: a spiritual line of development--(which is concerned with the source of ultimate meaning—and a spiritual level of any line, which is the highest level of any such line—for example, a spiritual cognitive level. So if you refer to this latter concept, it is Ok to say that Spirit is “at the end of the rainbow,” so to speak. But I find that a bit misleading because it can take you to believe that you will become “spiritual” only when you achieve the highest reaches of the human potential in all endeavors. A feast for the super-ego! Now you're screwed, because you will NEVER get there. (And your inner critic will remind you often of you shortcomings as a human/spiritual being.)

Let me use me and my running as an example. Given my biology, my history and my current lifestyle, there is only so much speed that I can develop in my life. If I like to run, I'm not going to run a mile in less than four minutes. There is just no way I could do that with my body and my age and my training. Maybe if I had started when I was a child I could have made it but now, “no way, Jose.”

I can't play basketball like Michael Jordan. No matter how much I practice, I just don't have what it takes to do it. You may say that's too bad. I'll never be a fully realized individual because I cannot grow to run fast or play basketball like Michael Jordan. But if you think that in order to fully realize myself as a human being I have to do those things, you're nuts.

What's a poor human being to do, given that we'll never reach perfection? For me, the answer is that you have to call off the search. You have to stop torturing yourself, thinking that spiritual experience only occurs at the highest level of development; that you have to go to stratospheric heights in consciousness in order to experience your full divine nature. That is just not true. That is a nightmare where the present gets alienated to never-arriving future.

If you just relax and take a breath, wherever you are right now, in your current level of development, if you just let go of the striving, consciousness will shine from you, through you, as you, out into everything, and will look back at you from everything, through everything, as everything. That's all it is and there's nothing more. You can be an alcoholic and maybe you cannot get out of your addiction. Or maybe you are in emotional pain and you do not know what to do. That doesn't make you any less human. Therefore that doesn't make you any less divine. I just remember a phrase I read somewhere, I wish I could recall where: "You are not a human being having a spiritual experience; you are a spiritual being, having a human experience."

So perhaps the notions of spirituality and development are best kept separate. Development goes really slow and is quite unusual beyond a certain level. Most of us will be stuck in a certain range. Some of us may get farther along some line than others, but as human beings we are fairly limited in our capacity to achieve the highest level of our potential, the highest rung of the ladder going from the unconscious to the Super-conscious.

The good news is that Spirit is not the upper rung of the ladder, but the wood out of which the ladder is made. In addition to climbing the ladder (please don't get me wrong, I LOVE development!), we need to get in touch with its essence. Essential depth relieves you from the stress of never-quite-being-there. You don't have to get to the upper rung to be in touch with the wood. Wherever you are, right there, you are touching it with your very hands.

It's ridiculous to say there's more spirit inside the church than outside the church, or there's more spirit in Jerusalem than in New York. Spirit and God is ever-present in any of its manifestations. Plato said the universe is the visible side of God. That means trashy music is the visible side of God as much as a sublime Symphony. At that level there is no difference.

RV: I see and hear expressed many kinds of aspirations around developmental models like Spiral Dynamics. Would you say that's misplaced?

FK: It depends. There are two drivers. One is fear and the other is love. When you are driven by fear then it's completely misplaced. The fear driver is exemplified by the thought, "Unless I get to Turquoise or Coral, I'm nothing. I'm not evolved and I will not be saved. If I want to 'get to heaven', I need to develop to the higher stages of the spiral." That's just like the person who claims unless I make it to vice president, I'm worthless or unless I have \$5 million in the bank, I'm ashamed of myself or unless I have a beautiful wife or a successful husband then I have no self esteem.

The fear is that you are and will remain empty unless you get something to fill you up. The sad truth is that if you think you're empty, you're like a black hole: nothing is going to fill you up. No matter what object you try to use to assuage your fear, it's never going to work. Some people are trying to get a lot of money. Some people are trying to get a lot of enlightenment. Whether material or spiritual, it's all the same materialism. You're still trying to get something that will fill up the emptiness that you believe you are.

Saying that to be realized I need to evolve to a higher state is like saying that I need to have a Mercedes Benz, a lot of money, great clothes, or to be successful in order to be worthy.

At some point in your life you might change. You might realize "Wait a minute! I'm not empty. I'm full. I am more than full. I am overflowing with fullness and freedom." Then, you leave fear and you enter love. Now your life becomes a

quest to express that fullness and that freedom. Now you are not looking to fill yourself up by achieving something. You are actually looking for ways in which you can express the fullness and freedom that you already are. You don't work to make money, although money is part of the deal; you work to express your creative potential in the service of others. That's when you do your best work.

I don't think Picasso painted because he was afraid that he wouldn't have enough money to pay the rent. I don't think Bill Gates is too worried about supporting himself in his old age. There can be other drivers, such as power or prestige. I don't know much about Bill Gates or Picasso as individuals, I'm just using their cases as a metaphor to illustrate this potential to work beyond the fear-incentive provided by material needs.

When you operate from love you can say that as a human being you want to be the fullest possible expression of consciousness. And you want to be in this world to invite other people to wake up to who they truly are, not because unless you do that you are nothing, but because you cannot stop it. It's almost an irrepressible urge. It's like breathing. Once you inspire and you taste air, you cannot hold your breath.

When I feel myself so full I'm just bursting with energy and creative potential, I'm going to do something with it. Then I'm acting out of love. Now out of love I do many things. I can work on myself. I can try to refine my skills at running, basketball, piano, business, teaching or at anything; I can even try to advance up the spiral dynamics stages of consciousness. But I'm not doing that because I'm afraid that if I don't succeed I'm worthless. I'm doing that because it seems like a skillful way to express my freedom and my fullness, my worth--which is ultimately not mine but Spirit's. It is just expressing the ultimate richness of Spirit in this plane. I am a conscious vehicle for that expression, which is the greatest joy that exists.

That's why I tell you it's not wrong to try to develop. I would not discourage anybody from trying to grow. The question is, why are you trying to grow? And if you think that unless you

grow you are worthless, you are operating out of fear and you will never get out of the nightmare. Once you are at peace with yourself and you find the truth of who you are essentially, your quest for growth becomes simply the quest to express the most beautiful and radiant way the truth of existence.

RV: That's a beautiful lesson, Fred. Earlier in the interview you mentioned how much you like to teach. And clearly, from the things you have been sharing with us you have a lot to share. Are you still teaching and how can people access that?

FK: If anybody's interested they can send me an email from the web sites: [www.leadlearn.com](http://www.leadlearn.com) or [www.Axialent.com](http://www.Axialent.com).

RV: Thank you. Do you have any book length publications in the works?


FK: I wrote a trilogy in Spanish called Metamanagement that I'm translating right now. I believe that before the end of the year it will be published.

RV: Wonderful. I hope you will let me know when it's available.

FK: Yes, I'll be happy to.

RV: Thank you so very much.

FK: You're very welcome.

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Even everyday people succeed  
with everyday  
wealth