

## LIFE BELOW THE WATERLINE

ARTICLE

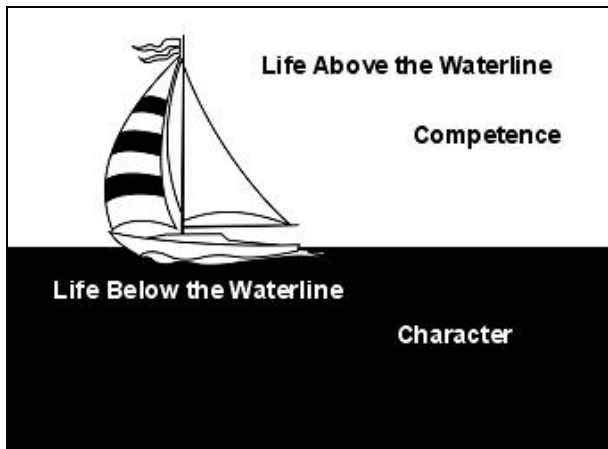
### TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Growing up in southwest Michigan I remember the sights, smells, and events of the fall. From Harvest Days to apple picking, from walks on the piers to bonfires, it's just a great time of year. Another scene I remember is when the marinas take in the boats for winter storage. During the boating season we see top-side: the shine, amenities, and uniqueness of each water craft. But this act exposes another essential function of the boat; unseen in the water but critical to its success. Laymen call it the "underside," most know it as the hull. Each form has a unique shape that gives it certain handling and performance characteristics. But one thing is certain, it is of utmost importance.

The repeated emphasis from anyone who talks about or writes about transformational leadership is the importance of intentional focusing on inner transformation – **life below the waterline**:

- Robert Quinn, "When people alter their interior world, they also alter their exterior world." *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*
- Kevin Kushman, "Our ability to grow as a leader is based on our ability to grow as a person." *LEADERSHIP From The Inside Out*
- Ken Blanchard in his book *The Secret: What Great Leaders Know – and DO*, paints the picture of an iceberg and its makeup below the surface.

The implications are clear: be aware of your inner life – **life below the waterline**. I was introduced to this analogy years ago. At times I've been uniquely aware of it and other times I've sadly ignored the principles. However, my alignment doesn't change the time-tested truth. I'm just asked to make the choice to live according to what is right, and ultimately works.



A decade ago Dee Hock, founder and former CEO VISA credit card association rocked the leadership world when he proposed if leaders truly understood the system they were asked to lead they would make the unconventional choice to manage the right people with the right energy. He suggested that leaders spend fifty percent of their time managing themselves. How could this be with

deadlines and profits hanging in the balance?

He wrote in an article entitled, *The Art of Chaordic Leadership*, “The first and paramount responsibility of anyone who purports to manage (or lead) is to manage self: one’s own integrity, character, ethics, knowledge, wisdom, temperament, words, and acts. It is a complex unending incredibly difficult, oft-shunned task. We spend little time and rarely excel at self-management precisely because it is much more difficult than prescribing and controlling the behavior of others. However, without management of self, no one is fit for authority no matter how much they acquire, for the more authority they acquire the more dangerous they become.” (Leader to Leader) Those are poignant words for anyone in any type of leadership position.

**Self-management is making the choice to spend time below the waterline.**

It tends to be a bit easier and certainly quicker to spit and polish the surface materials – our persona. The difficult work of our inner world doesn’t respond to a quick fix and is certainly not easy.

**What does focusing on life below the waterline require?**

We need to step away from the routine and examine whether:

- Our behaviors are aligning our values
- We are making decisions based on our purpose or mindlessly reacting to people and events
- We are treating people with value and dignity or like objects to manipulate

- We are genuinely serving people or seeking to be served first
- We are “leaking” goodness or rudeness

The list could continue and should. That’s the gift and challenge of inner transformation. It is a life-long process of **becoming instead of achieving**

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***What if...***

**...we spent more time giving attention to our life below the waterline?**

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