

Answering the Call – The Path to Spiritual Leadership

*"Why do you want to climb Mount Everest?", the reporter insistently asked.
George Mallory's iconic answer: "Because it is there!"*

Introduction – (review)

On our first presentation we wrestled with a definition of leadership, making the case for influencing others toward a common goal. Spiritual leadership is a model emphasizing **values**, **calling**, and **membership**. It's about personal transformation and guiding others through example, drawing inspiration from a higher source.

Building up, on the second presentation we made the case for these dynamics: to lead others effectively, one must first master self-leadership. It was all rooted in the ancient aphorism **"know thyself."** This involves understanding your strengths, weaknesses, and values through self-reflection, personality tests (MBTI), feedback (Johari Window), and diverse life experiences.

On the third presentation we emphasised that one can't lead others unless knowing how he/she has been led in life, through personal influences, learning from others' journeys or exploring various leadership theories. Our **worldview**, shaped by mentors, life experiences and culture, profoundly influences our leadership style – "who we are is how we lead".

These three presentations are like the few steps back an athlete takes before starting the jump or throwing the javelin. We are now ready to proceed.

Sources of inspiration

Think about those moments when you've felt truly inspired. We all face despair, loneliness, and dark times, but just as certainly, we experience moments of joy, light, and bright horizons. Let's focus on those. Where do these moments come from?

1. **Nature:** Perhaps it's a majestic mountain, a powerful waterfall, a serene beach, or a peaceful forest trail.
2. **Memorable places:** It could be tied to a cherished memory: your grandparents' home, the familiar path back home, a silent cathedral, or your old school or university.

3. **People:** Don't forget the influence of others, like a supportive mentor or a great team.
4. **Art creations:** Sometimes, inspiration strikes through a moving piece of music – a favourite song, a grand symphony, or even a stirring national anthem. A powerful speech or a beautiful poem can also ignite something within you.
5. **Specific Moments:** Even a particular time of year, like the rejuvenation of spring or the warmth of Christmas, can be a wellspring of inspiration.

The mountain

For me, the idea of a mountain serves as a profound source of inspiration. Mountains have long been revered as places of spiritual encounter, where heaven and earth seem to meet, where one aims to reach hidden sacred sites, or getting new visions at breathtaking heights. This powerful metaphor isn't new to leadership, either. Whether it's the structure of a hierarchy, the perspective of a "balcony view," or the visual representation of a pyramid, the mountain is a constant presence in leadership theories.

I see it as a mountain, but ultimately, it represents any challenge that can be a blessing in disguise. It's about looking at those obstacles, those daunting and yet inviting peaks, and recognizing the transformative power they hold when you reach the summit.

Let me illustrate it in 10 points:

1. **A higher aspiration:** The mountain's height is a constant reminder that there's always a level beyond my current reach, prompting me to look for what lies beyond the familiar.
2. **The call to effort:** Its toughness is a clear invitation to push past my perceived limits. I know that true rewards aren't easily won, and I'm making myself ready for the effort required.
3. **Feasible challenge:** Yet, the mountain isn't insurmountable. The knowledge that others have conquered it before reminds me that this isn't a mission impossible, but a challenging, doable feat.
4. **Present obstacle:** Right now, the mountain stands blocking my immediate path. It's a temporary barrier. When reaching the summit, the mountain will be under my feet. It will be my friend!
5. **A lesson in humility:** As I face its enormity, I'm struck by how small I am in comparison. This humbling perspective prepares me to accept my limitations and grow beyond them.
6. **The journey's reality:** I understand that the path to the summit isn't straight. There will be more valleys and peaks before reaching my ultimate goal.

7. **Promises of new visions:** With each step upward, the mountain promises new perspectives. The higher I climb, the clearer and broader my view becomes.
8. **Unveiling new paths:** From the summit, I expect to see unforeseen routes and opportunities, guiding me towards future aspirations beyond the current challenge.
9. **Renewed spirit:** Reaching the top, and returning, means coming back energized and inspired, armed with a fresh vision for what's next.
10. **Ever-present call:** And I know the mountain will always be there, a steadfast symbol for my next journey, a reminder of what I'm capable of, and an invitation for a future comeback.

That is me. You can think of your own metaphor and try to do the same. Remember the five categories: nature, memorable places, people, art creations, specific moments.

Exercise

Time for an exercise? Having prepared 5 images, one of each category, let them write on the chat what insights they have when looking/reflecting on each.

Our model

The model of Spiritual Leadership we recommend to you is C.R.O.W.N. We present it as an acronym, fully aware that it may only work in English language.

C – Connection to a Higher Power. In our first presentation, we highlighted the idea of a Higher Power. This connection manifests in the values that drive your life, a profound sense of calling, and a feeling of membership in something bigger than yourself. It's the mountain's summit, a spiritual beacon guiding your ascent.

R – Realism regarding one's limits & capacities. Our second presentation invited you to know yourself – your strengths, weaknesses, even your unknowns. While the C is like a call to higher grounds, the R is the rope that ties you in, asking for a balance of an honest assessment of your capacities and acknowledging there's much more beyond your current understanding.

O – Outlook, shaped by worldview. In our third presentation, we highlighted the worldview as the fundamental framework, the lens through which you interpret reality. Your outlook, therefore, is your prevailing mental attitude towards life and its challenges. It's the expanding panorama you gain as you climb, revealing new possibilities. Look up!

W – Winning mindset. You’re in a race with yourself, not in a competition with others. Your growth mindset is based on the unwavering belief that *if the call is there* (see C), then surely the path to achieving it *just needs to be discovered*. It is right here, unveiling under your feet as you add one more step upward!

N – New paths. The ascent inevitably leads to new perspectives, revealing opportunities and directions previously unseen from below. You’re not only a pathfinder, instead you are discovering new routes. In the end, you are preparing for future journeys to brighter horizons.

Applying CROWN to Education field

C – Connection. Think of your academic vocation. What drew you to this field? What impact do you aspire to have on your students, your discipline, and society? (One of your students may one day be the president of the country.) Think of your “Higher Power” making the call – it may be *the pursuit of truth, social justice, intellectual curiosity, or a commitment to student flourishing*.

Mountain metaphor: This is the summit you are called to ascend – the highest ideals and guiding principles that make your academic work meaningful and impactful.

R – Realism. Take the risk of an honest and rigorous self-assessment. Just as you critically evaluate theories and data, this is about understanding your own strengths and limitations as *educator, researcher, and mentor*. *What are your areas of expertise? Where do you need to develop new skills or seek collaboration?* Your aspirations are high (the “call to higher grounds”), but you acknowledge as well personal and systemic constraints (the “rope that ties you in”).

Mountain metaphor: This is the honest appraisal of self, of the terrain and of the potential journey. There is no smooth ascent! You will discover both valleys and peaks of weaknesses and strengths.

O – Outlook. Your worldview is the lens through which you interpret the educational landscape. *You can focus on a negative outlook: low wage, cuts in funding projects, new and strange generations of students, overwhelming technology etc. Or you can focus on a positive outlook: new opportunities, productive collaboration, new frontiers, a promising generation of disciples.*

Mountain metaphor: This is the ever-widening panorama you gain with each step upward, reinterpreting reality in a positive and adaptable perspective. Looking up, the summit may still seem very far. Looking down, there is undeniable progress.

W – Winning mindset. In an academic context, you’re not winning in grades only. **There is a commitment to continuous improvement, even a lifelong learning.** Your intellectual growth should have an impactful contribution for making the world better. It’s the conviction that **if your academic calling is clear, the path to achieving scholarly and pedagogical excellence will be discovered** through persistent effort and innovation.

Mountain metaphor: This is the unwavering resolve to reach the summit, not just for the view, but for understanding. Even more, for what is to follow! (see next step)

N – New paths. Ascending within your field and leadership roles invariably leads to new perspectives, revealing unforeseen avenues for teaching, research, and service. This encourages innovation and new community engagements. People should see a clear “before and after” in your way of doing things.

Mountain metaphor: From the summit, you’re tempted to just see the way you came. All right, do it. But you also **see the vast, unexplored territory: new questions, innovative teaching approaches, and unforeseen collaborations** (like this one, with HIM Research) that will impact the next stage of your academic journey.

The mountain is still there. No longer a threat, but an invitation for future ascents.

“Because it is there!”

Let’s return to that iconic exchange between George Mallory and the reporter. In the early 20th century, with the North and South Poles conquered, a “third pole” of sorts emerged as the ultimate challenge: the towering Himalayas. (Some even refer to the Himalayas as a pole due to their immense snow and ice, ranking *third* after the Earth’s geographical poles).

George Mallory, a British mountaineer and, a lesser-known fact, *a teacher* of English and History, set his sights on Mount Everest. As part of British expeditions, he discovered new paths in 1921, laying out what appeared to be a viable route to the summit. Then, in 1922, he and his team achieved a world record, reaching an astonishing altitude of 8,321 meters – the highest ever at the time. They got an Olympic gold medal for that, in 1924.

The same year (8th of June, 1924), Mallory and his climbing partner, Andrew Irvine, were last seen just 240 meters from Everest’s peak. We’ll never truly know if they reached the summit before they tragically disappeared. Their bodies were discovered decades later (1999, 75 years

later), adding to the enigma. An intriguing detail: Mallory always carried a picture of his wife, intending to leave it at the summit. When his body was found, the picture was gone. Did he achieve his goal and leave it there?

Sir Edmund Hillary, who, in 1953, became the first person confirmed to reach the summit and return, eloquently stated of Mallory: "He was really *the initial pioneer* of the whole idea of climbing Mount Everest."

This resonates powerfully in education. You may not always reach your personal "Everest", but like Mallory, your efforts and your passion can inspire countless others to set their hearts on their own ambitious ascents. You become the pioneer for those who follow.

Coming down in the valley

Our next and final presentation *The Spirit of Serving – Servant Leadership* is a calling to come back into the valley, to where those we lead are. Think of the profound example of Mother Teresa, whose life embodied selfless service.

Robert Greenleaf (*Servant as Leader*), challenges us: "The servant as leader must constantly ask himself, how can I use myself to serve best?" Serving your students in discovering their own values, meaning and purpose, a calling and a membership to a greater cause.

Supplementary notes:

A service in memory of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine was held at St. Paul's Cathedral, London. The Bible text was "*Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*", as it is found in Psalm 84:5 of the Latin Vulgate Bible ("he has set his heart on ascents").

The question was asked: "*Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*. Was it only the love of the high mountains that was set in hearts like these? No; but rather that with the love of the mountains was *the ascent of spiritual altitudes*, splendid peaks of courage and unselfishness and cheerfulness, such as are reached not necessarily by the surefooted and the clear-headed, but always by the compassionate, the brotherly, and the pure in heart."

"It is not for us timid pedestrians to pretend that we understand your love of the heights. But if even from a distance and from some miserably lower level we have looked from afar upon the mountains, or known the silence of the snowfields, and the widening vision, and the exhilarating keenness of the air and the perfect azure of the skies (and you are good enough to believe that even the humblest climber may breathe the Spirit of the Mountains), can any one wonder at the fascination those mountains have for the real climber, that you have so set in your hearts the love of the heights? *Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit*."