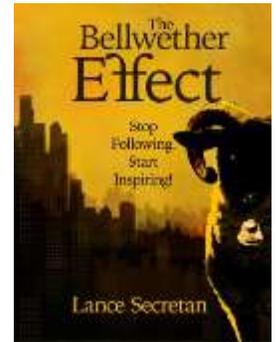


The Bellwether Effect



Suggestions for Setting up a Reading Group Guide

First, Take [The Bellwether Survey](#)

- **About the book**

All of us who are working in the field of leadership are committed to inspiring, coaching and teaching others to build inspiring organizations. BUT, before we can create the kind of workplaces that inspire everyone, we must first remove the business processes that are deeply uninspiring. All individuals and organizations have the potential (**p**) to achieve high levels of performance (**HP**), but too often obstructive (**o**) practices demotivate us and put sand in our gears. We can write the equation like this:

High Performance = potential – obstruction, or,

$$HP=P-o$$

Why do we continue to adopt, invest in and support ineffective business practices, even though there is scant evidence that they work, and plenty of evidence that they don't. Many leaders are so disconnected from the operating and administrative practices of their organizations that they are relying on what they are told by others for their sense of the organization's pulse. This creates an echo chamber, an "emperor's new clothes" syndrome, and what Secretan refers to in the book as the accompanying "dissonance"—a perception at the top that all is well, while the experience in the rest of the organization is that it isn't.

Potential and obstruction are closely related—we just need to introduce them in the right order—remove antiquated and demoralizing business processes that are a barrier to inspiration first, so that we can then concentrate on building great organizations that inspire. Secretan writes that there are a number of embedded, old-fashioned, ineffective business practices and beliefs, which, collectively, present a formidable barrier to creating high-performance organizations. Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is also the noble art of removing things that add no value. Often, it is necessary to remove things in order to achieve things. We need to take away some redundant and hindering business practices so that we can add more modern approaches that inspire. Doing so could change everything.

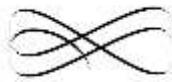
In *The Bellwether Effect*, Dr. Secretan first proposes a theory that explains how and why leaders are attracted to, and seduced by, trendy ideas, and the process by which these ideas then become mainstream. He calls the originators of these trends, "bellwethers", hence the book's title. He then goes on to describe eight examples of counterproductive business practices, among them:



1. fear-based management
2. motivation
3. separateness and silos
4. employee engagement surveys
5. performance appraisals
6. salary grades and pay scales
7. mission, vision, and values statements, and
8. the use of war as a metaphor for business.

In each case, Dr. Secretan proposes a novel and inspiring alternative that could lead to transformation and an inspiring culture.

Lance Secretan claims that we have lost our passion for corporate life—during his presentations to audiences, he often asks them this question: “What percentage of the population do you think would leave the corporate world and pursue different interests if they had a completely free hand?” Like an auction, he starts at 50% and the audience will typically raise the offer until they settle at an estimate of something more than 80%. Why is this a tragedy? Because, apart from the human anguish and suffering it causes, we live in a capitalist society, one of whose main engines (besides the church and government) is commerce, and if we botch this critical source of livelihood and exchange, we risk losing everything. So this is not an inconsequential issue—and it is time to reset our beliefs about what really matters in corporate life.



Discussion Guide

1. Who are the Bellwether Forerunners that your organization admires tracks, watches, follows, and copies?
2. How many of the eight Bellwether obstructive and demoralizing business practices are currently deployed in your organization?
3. Is fear a part of your culture? What would it take to remove it? Who are the main culprits or perpetrators? Who are the victims? Is anyone in your organization at risk of departing because they're tired of fear-based leadership or intimidation? How difficult is it to introduce the concept of “love” into your organization? Are you willing to try?
4. Is the difference between inspiration and motivation understood in your organization? Is motivation widely practiced? Do you understand the links between motivation and fear? How does Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Secretan's concepts of “the social self” and “essential self”, and the difference between inspiration and motivation all fit together? What would it take to create a corporate culture that relied more on inspiration than motivation?



5. Secretan argues that separateness and silos are uninspiring. Do you follow a philosophy of creating departments, functions, pay grades, titles and hierarchies that promote separateness? What would it take to change the culture so that teams organize around projects instead of functions? And would that be good for your organization?
6. How do you gauge the level of discretionary passion and contribution that your employees are willing to invest in your organization? How do you measure the level of employee happiness, commitment and passion? Would the CASTLE® Principles be a useful source for determining the answers to these questions in future?
7. Is your company still conducting annual or biannual performance reviews? Have you checked to see whether these are popular, useful and instructive? Secretan argues that regular “constructive check-ins” would be a more useful approach for supporting employees in both their performance and their careers— do you agree?
8. Do your employees feel a deep sense of connection between their work, their performance, and their income? Do they have an entrepreneurial “ownership” of the work they do? Can they see how their work directly influences the top and bottom lines? Would an Added-value Compensation Plan be an improvement over the current system used in your organization? Added-value compensation systems require a culture change to “open book management”—can you see your organization making this shift?
9. Does your organization have a Mission Statement, Values Statement and a Vision Statement? And if it does, can employees articulate them without referring to any written materials? Do these statements fire up the spirits of your employees? Even more important do employees **live** them? Can you see the advantage of removing all of these and replacing them with a single, system-wide, unifying dream?
10. Do you or your colleagues use metaphors of war in your conversation and in explaining goals, targets, corporate performance etc.? Can you think of ways in which the language used could be less fear-based and more gentle and inspiring? In your view, and given the research around the subject contained in the book, do you think this would be an improvement?
11. Secretan makes the point in the final chapter of the book that it is quite possible that many readers will not change anything as a result of reading the book. He goes into detail about why we resist and avoid change, and he asks provocative questions of the reader, asking them to rethink the decision not to change, if that turns out to be the case. How do you feel about change? Are you open to change? Even if you don’t agree with some of the ideas in the book, are you prepared to review them again to see if there’s still something you might learn? Are you prepared to embrace concepts that are new, different or contrary to what you have always believed? Are you prepared to accept the criticism and pushback that often happens when pioneers seek to create change?

