

Forbes artikel over The Embodiment Conference

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# Embodied Leadership: A Cure For What Ails Us?



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[Leadership Strategy](#)

*Smart strategies from Zen leadership and the science of resonance.*



Over 400,000 registrants explore ten channels of embodied living and leading at The Embodiment ... [+]

MATT SHEARING, THE EMBODIMENT CONFERENCE TEAM

“Oops, we created a small country,” [Mark Walsh](#) messaged in reference to [The Embodiment Conference](#) he founded, a free online conference running for the rest of this week, involving a thousand teachers of embodiment across ten different channels, including business and leadership. Bigger than a 10-day conference, “This is the decade of embodiment,” declares Daniela Wetzel, a conference organizer. And so it would seem with registrants numbering more than 400,000 worldwide and an ongoing [Facebook community](#) of 37,000 and counting.

Embodiment is trending. At a time of deep divisions and discontent, the dissociations of head from heart, of talk from walk, of action from a felt sense of its consequences, are wholly inadequate for dealing with the wicked issues we face. So it’s not surprising that an antidote is resonating in the

Zeitgeist, what many herald as an emerging stage of human development in which the clever head re-integrates with the deep wisdom of the body. Embodied leadership is showing the way.

It's not surprising that it took us awhile to get here. The evolutionary story of our species, our cultures, and ourselves personally, as skillfully assembled by [Ken Wilber](#) in his [Integral Theory](#), would say the distancing of mind from body is a necessary stage of development. In the child it comes with increased control of one's emotions and impulses, including sitting the body still while the mind goes on a journey of learning arithmetic to calculus, from playing video games to coding games. This rational stage of development, based on the head's calculating logic, is the mark of the modern age. It's associated with materialism and self-reliance, technological advance and Wall Street thinking. Not bad things, to be sure, yet not without consequences.

Among those consequences are “externalities” relative to a particular point of view – whether it be it a person, company or country – that simply moved what we didn't want to deal with to somewhere else on the planet or the atmosphere surrounding it. Out of sight, out of mind; such is the easy logic of head-only thinking. Co-arising with the problems created by this partial logic have been further stages of development – postmodern and what Wilber calls Integral – that embrace a broader systems view, greater diversity, the managing of paradoxical tensions, and ultimately the flex and flow of interconnectedness. Some expression of these more advanced stages has been a near requirement for leaders to be successful in running complex global organizations. This more inclusive mindset was on display, for example, in 2019 when 181 CEO's came together to [redefine the purpose of corporations](#) to include the “externalities” of social impact – far beyond shareholder value, which had been the mantra of the rational stage.

This more inclusive systems view, turned inward, becomes the re-unification of mind and body. “It’s like a homecoming,” as one leader described his experience of embodiment. And what an expansive home it turns out to be when one hones an increasing ability to work with difficult feelings, catch the vibe of another person, or fall into rhythm with life itself. “Come home to the body; come home to the earth,” reads the subtext to The Embodiment Conference, as one felt sense readily leads to the other. Feeling the rhythm of the earth in one’s own being, the idea of “externalities” evaporates. On the one hand, the embodied leader increasingly senses the systemic wickedness of wicked issues from a heating up planet to racism, to a pandemic sending millions back into poverty and hundreds of thousands to their grave. On the other hand, the payoff of embodiment is a deeper engagement with life itself. Things the head can only think about, the body can feel; what the head can only imagine, the body can resonate into being.

That’s why embodiment is at the heart of Zen leadership, i.e., leading one-with the whole picture. The Zen informing Zen leadership is not a philosophy or belief system for the head but, as [Gordon Greene Roshi](#) puts it, “[manual labor](#).” It is physically changing the body in order to set the mind free from slavish self-interest and open it to connected wisdom. It is the kind of leadership wide enough to beat with the hearts of all people and reconcile multiple points of view. It is the kind of leadership deep enough to tackle systemic issues, getting at the underlying habits that hold surface issues in place.

As we work with the body, we get access to a laboratory, a mini universe, where we can enact systemic transformation. For when we embody an insight, a goal or a relationship, it means we resonate with it enough that we let it change our neural maps and pathways, connective tissue and tension patterns – our habit-formed infrastructure – thus enabling creativity and

adaptive behaviors. Tackling the systemic roots of racism in oneself, for example, fuels the creative wisdom needed to unwind the systemic roots of racism in society. Leaders who embody resonance with the earth can lead the way to wiser decisions about how we thrive with the earth in our companies and communities. Conversely, without this inner work we remain creatures of habit – habits that were generally formed from an earlier, less inclusive, stage of development. Since habits are, by definition, products of the past, and leadership is about bringing a desired future into the present, without the inner work of embodiment, leadership can't fully do its outer work.

Perhaps the Embodiment Conference did make a small country. We would do well to make it a larger one.