

# 1 The Principle of Intention

**A**lmost everything you do starts with an intention, and an intention starts with an idea in your mind. An intention includes not just what you want to do but the why behind what you want to do. For example, as a school leader, I may intend to raise the achievement scores of my students—but why?

- So I'll look good, get a raise, and have my contract renewed?
- So my staff will feel successful and feel good about themselves?
- So I can feel successful as a leader?
- So I can have some evidence that the programs I've initiated actually work?
- So I have some evidence that our students have learned what they need to be successful?

All five of these reasons are possible. All five may actually exist simultaneously. However, each of them is distinguishable by its focus. Notice how in some of these examples you the leader are the focus, whereas in others the focus is outside of yourself and is on teachers or students. Often, if not most of the time, there's more than one underlying reason why people have a particular intention. Human beings are complex, and our underlying motives often comprise a variety of factors that may be of varying importance. Sometimes people don't even ask themselves what their underlying motives are. For important intentions, we suggest that you ask yourself not only what you want to manifest but also why. Ask yourself who is the primary focus—yourself or others? The more your underlying intention focuses on benefiting others, the more you will engender support from the Universe.

Think about something you accomplished that made you feel good, something that was meaningful to you. When you peel the onion to find the inner

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core of your intention, in all likelihood, you'll find that the focus was something or someone other than yourself. Our satisfaction and sense of fulfillment increase when our intentions are focused on the needs of others. Our sense of purpose and our sense of meaning grow when our underlying motivation is to help others.

In Steve's last superintendency, he worked hard to win passage of a \$21 million bond referendum to expand and upgrade the district's high school. He fought tooth and nail to include money for state of the art technology and flexible open-space areas that he believed were indispensable to 21st-century schooling. As part of the intention process, he envisioned students and teachers in an environment designed to maximize their learning. His intention was to have the referendum approved so that the high school could be upgraded and expanded to accommodate increased enrollment. He focused on getting community support to provide the funding for the project. But his passion came from his underlying motivation to ensure that his students and teachers had the facilities and infrastructure they would need to succeed in the years ahead. The "what" was the passage of a referendum, but the "why" was his desire to do something truly important to support future teaching and learning for untold numbers of students and teachers.

Whether or not you realize it, your intentions set up an energy field around themselves. You strengthen that field by what you think and what you envision. You strengthen it by what you write and what you say and by enrolling people through collaborative processes. The more explicit you make your intentions and the more time and energy you give to implementing them, the more you increase the likelihood of seeing your intentions actually manifest in reality. Intention is not only a principle: It is a power, a force. When your intentions are aligned with the higher aspects of yourself, you set the conditions for the Universe to support you in bringing your intentions into physical reality.

### Applying the Principle of Intention

- Select something and declare it to be an intention.
- Declare it to yourself.
- Write it down: It is my intention that . . .
- Declare it to others.
- Close your eyes and use visualization to see it in your mind's eye.
- Make note of ways you can use your position to talk about your intention both formally and informally.
- Write more about it and share your writing.
- Privately expand the energy field through prayer.

## INTENTION IS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP

Intention is a framework for the creation of ultimate reality. It's the building plans for reality. Before you can have a plan, you've got to have an intention, the thought of what you want to see happen or where you want to go or what your ultimate goal is. From that beginning, you can start developing plans. Sending the intention out to the Universe creates energy. It creates an energy cycle that is largely outside of your control once you send it out. So you're not just acting from your own center; you're also enlisting the aid of a lot of other seen and unseen powers outside of you, stirring up the pot of energy that the Universe makes available when you create a sense of what you want to do and why you want to do it. You can think of an intention as the ripples of a stone skipping along the surface of a pond. Each time it touches the pond, the stone generates a series of ever-expanding concentric circles, and the sets of circles intersect and overlap at some point. The pattern created by intention is similar to the surface of the pond after the stone passes through, but because the medium is life and not water, the reverberations travel like light and do not lose strength as they contribute to the fabric of life.

Most leaders do not have a strong enough appreciation of the power of intention as a force for shaping reality. People do or want to do so many things that it's not always clear what their intentions are. So it's very important for leaders to have clear in their own mind what their intentions are—not only what they would like to see happen in a particular set of circumstances or in a particular dynamic, but also what motivation lies one step beneath the goal itself. Besides knowing what your goals are in any given set of circumstances, you should, to the extent that it is possible, ask yourself about your primary motivation. This is a personal process between you and your inner or higher self and, perhaps ultimately, the Divine. That internal dialogue about what you want to do and why you want to do it ignites the spark that goes out into the universe as an energy field.

For example, you could have a goal to lose weight, but the intention is to be healthy. The intention is more fundamental than the goal. The intention can even create a set of goals. The goals themselves are not the intention; the intention is underneath the goal and explains why. Why would *you* want to be healthy beyond the fact that everyone does? Your intention to be healthy may tie into your need to have sufficient energy to make a more positive contribution to the world or to meet your professional responsibilities. So intention ties into a more fundamental set of reasons about why you want to do something.

As a leader, the intentions that carry the most force are the ones that will benefit people other than yourself. But that doesn't mean that your intentions can't also benefit you. You can benefit from being healthy, but also by being

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healthy you are in a better position to serve others. Intention is part of the dance of attunement between you and the Universe. When you're attuned, everybody benefits. When you're out of attunement, no one benefits. And that's a good reason for wanting to be attuned with the Universe because whatever happens for the Universe happens for you, too. There's a mutual interplay between you and the Universe. When your intentions are strictly selfish, the Universe is unlikely to assist you, and consequently, the Universe won't benefit either. So you have to be thoughtful, with some sense of clarity, when you formulate your intentions.

### THOUGHT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU THINK

Why is thought more important than you think? Thought is the “Energizer® bunny” for what happens. Like most people, you may assume that what you think is private; it doesn't go anywhere, just rattles inside your head. You figure you can have these thoughts and not have any impact. But the reality is that a thought creates a force of energy that immediately goes beyond your head and out into the world at large. The moment you create thought, you create potential action. It's like taking the genie out of the bottle. Once you think it, it's over. The thought escaped. There's no holding it back. There's no way to think, “Well this is private. It's just between me and my head at this point.” No. When you create a thought, that thought immediately leaves your being and goes out into the universe, where it has the potential to start manifesting itself in activities and results.

Believing that thoughts are private, most people assume that they're free to think outlandish things, and maybe even hurtful things, and that thought is a harmless way of mentally processing options and choices. Yet, over our years of work together, we've come to understand that your thoughts function in a number of powerful ways. One is that your thoughts send messages not only to your body but also to your spirit, affecting both. Another is that thought itself sets up energy patterns that you transmit. While we don't understand precisely how this occurs, we are convinced that thoughts can even be picked up by others under certain circumstances and by spiritual forces as well.

It's been reported that more than 80 percent of the people in America believe in the power of prayer, and prayer—whether it is spoken, written, or silent—involves thought. Unless you think that only certain types of thought project out into the Universe and the other ones are contained, you're left with the idea that all your thoughts radiate out. Where do they go? Do they just emanate out like a radio signal that gets fainter and fainter the further it travels? Or are they received and even recorded? There is a mystical school of thought that holds the belief that all thoughts, words, and deeds are recorded in another plane of existence known as the astral realm in something called the Akashic Record. In this view, thoughts not only radiate out but are also stored.

We know of no evidence that supports the existence of the Akashic Record, but the concept of being held accountable, on death, for how you lived your life exists in many religious traditions. If there's no record, what's the mechanism for doing that? The whole notion of being judged at the end of life at least raises the question as to whether people are going to be judged not only by their deeds but by their thoughts as well. Such notions might serve as a motivation to direct thoughts in more positive ways and, because thoughts affect the people who think them, to replace negative thinking (what we colloquially call "stinkin' thinkin'") with fruitful thinking.

Another reason that thought is more important than you think is that if you have one kind of thought pattern and try to act in another way, you create incredible cognitive dissonance. That disruptive pattern between thought and action is easily picked up by those around you. So if you're trying to be one way and you're thinking another way, it's no secret to anybody around you. At a bare minimum, others know that something is in conflict, that what you're trying to create in terms of your outward behavior is at odds with what you are internally. That's on one level. At another level, biblical scripture says, "As a man thinks, so shall he be." From a biblical perspective, it's clear that thinking can create the reality of action. It's very difficult to have impure thoughts and pure action. So you really do have to mind your thoughts pretty carefully.

## WHEN THOUGHT BECOMES PRAYER

Because the U.S. Constitution requires separation of church and state, prayer must be a private matter for leaders in the field of public education. Even so, suppose that what people think are just thoughts are in fact prayers, or are at least heard as prayer? Both of us have formalized ways of praying in which we sequentially go through a process of expressing gratitude, seeking guidance, praying for the well-being of others, and so forth. So there's a formalized prayer process that we employ and, considering our very different backgrounds—one of us being Christian and the other Jewish—our processes are quite similar. But thoughts, especially under duress, sometimes just spontaneously slip into the notion of prayer.

Clearly, there are thoughts people intend as prayer and other thoughts that may have a prayerful quality in terms of their content but that people don't think of as praying. For example, you might say to yourself or others, "I wish the world was more at peace" or "I want my friend to be well." Those thoughts have a prayerful quality to them in terms of content, but they differ from formal prayer because the thoughts do not address the Divine or divine forces. When your intention is to pray to a higher power, you have to activate the process in some way. To use a computer, you first have to turn it on. Whatever your conceptual view of the Divine may be, one of the countless ways to turn on the

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“prayer switch” is to use a salutation to address the Divine, such as “Dear God,” “Heavenly Father,” “Divine Light of the Universe,” and so forth. At other times, you might just use the actual word *pray* or *prayer*. For example, “I pray that my friend will have a quick and complete recovery.” In that case, you’re not naming the Divine directly, but you are indicating that your thought is a prayer because you state that it is. Either addressing the Divine in some way that is meaningful to you or designating a thought or action as a prayer by using the word *pray* or something like it transforms a thought into a prayer. Of course, countless symbols and spiritual practices turn thoughts into prayers. Essentially, thought becomes prayer when you want it to do so.

If you believe in angels or deities and beings from realms other than physical existence, and if you believe that everything in the universe is connected, then it would seem reasonable for there to be ways to access and even enlist those spiritual forces. This, too, could be considered a form of prayer. You are, in effect, seeking to enlist help from agents of the Divine rather than addressing your prayers directly to the Divine. Clearly, some people engage in rituals specifically designed to enlist particular spiritual entities such as the Archangel Michael, Green Tara, the goddess Kali, particular saints, and so forth. On the other hand, some people address their prayers to no particular entity; their prayer is more like sending an SOS signal “to all the ships at sea,” hoping that some spiritual entity will receive it. This is like sending out an open call over the spiritual airwaves to any and all entities that may be sympathetic to the particular concern expressed. The forms of prayer are limitless, but your intention is a critical element in all of them.

### **SPOKEN AND WRITTEN WORDS ARE KEYS TO MANIFESTING YOUR INTENTION**

The spoken word is like an accelerant. It takes thought, and it accelerates it. It’s like pouring kerosene on a fire. You could have a fire without the kerosene, but if you pour the kerosene on, it’s going to build faster. The spoken word creates a power on top of the power that’s already there, in essence by taking your thought from one level to the next level. By speaking out loud, you’ve upped the ante. You can take it a further step by writing your intention or creating a visual representation of it. There are different ways of bringing energy to an intention, and you can keep escalating the energy by being more and more concrete and more physical.

Support for the power of the spoken word can be found in the Bible and in other religious traditions. In fact, according to the Book of Genesis, the world itself was called into being by the spoken word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.” It doesn’t say, “God snapped his fingers.” It doesn’t

say, "God drew a picture." It says God spoke, and the world manifested. And while no one can lay claim to knowing the mind of God, you can certainly infer from the biblical story that there must have been an intention to create the world. The Bible says that the actual means used to transform that intention to a level of physical manifestation was the spoken word. Other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, also hold that sound emits an energy vibration that coalesces into physical form. The Bible further says that human beings are made in God's image, which raises the possibility that, as God's children, people may also have the power to create through the spoken word. This happens not in the sense of saying something and having it instantly appear, but rather in the sense that the spoken word sets up energy patterns that help transform intentions into reality.

Thoughts have power. Expressing those thoughts verbally steps up the power. Everyone has intentions, especially leaders who want to change the status quo. So one way of beginning the process of manifesting your intentions is to state them out loud. When you do that, the question becomes, "Who's listening and who's the audience?" When you speak out loud, is it in a closed room or a room full of people? Should you share your intention via radio and television? Should you say it out loud to the Universe metaphysically? You need to have in mind not only what you would like to manifest but also who you want to hear your words to create the opportunity for other people and forces to assist you in manifesting your intentions.

The process of saying things out loud also helps to clarify your thinking and state your intention clearly. When you speak it out loud, you're raising a posse. You're enlisting support and the aid of others, whether you mean to or not, simply by sharing it. You've brought those who hear you into the circle of intention at that point; you've invited them into your place. And, in doing so, you've created the possibility of their helping you. In terms of an energy level, a thought process has a pretty high frequency. When you express a thought in spoken words, you've lowered the frequency and created more reverberation. When you go to the level of the written word, you've lowered the frequency even further because you put your thought into a physical form that can be felt and touched. Everything in the universe is made up of energy, but the energy operates at different frequencies. The spoken word is a different frequency than the thought word, and the written word is a different frequency than the spoken word. Each one vibrates at a lower and lower level. As you turn your thought to spoken and written words, you are creating more potential to bring your intention into reality, simply by creating the vibration field.

That's why leaders benefit not only by stating their intentions but also by writing them down. After writing them down, you need to share what you have written in as many forums as possible. The very act of writing your intention down helps to clarify your thinking. When people react to what you have written, their reactions can help you refine what you are writing so that it



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better conveys your meaning. At times, when people read what you write, they interpret it in ways you never intended. So having your intention in writing allows you to refine and clarify it so that it becomes crystal clear. Having it in written form makes it easier to share and increases the likelihood that your message will be conveyed as intended.

### What Might This Look Like in Practice?

The following are examples of how the spoken word amplifies the written word in reference to program goals and mission statements.

Aiming to keep program goals simple and memorable, Paul used acronyms to convey program goals. In one district, his acronym was called MISSION SUCCESS: Each letter in the word *success* represented a district initiative. In another district, the acronym was STAR POWER, and the letters in *star* stood for the four district initiatives. Further cementing commitment to initiatives, Paul linked each acronym to the district's mission statement. With the STAR POWER initiative, for example, he tied the plan into the metaphor of a star giving off light. When he left that district, his associates named a star after him as a parting gift. This meaningful gift showed that they "got" what he was trying to do.

In Steve's work, he crafted something called the Superintendent's Vision Statement, which laid out his values and guiding principles in eight words and phrases. They were: being child centered, caring, being future oriented, being an exemplary model, quality, continuous improvement, being a learning organization, and lifelong learning. On the same page, each of these guiding principles was expanded into a statement; for example:

*XYZ district* is a school district that:

- Is child centered, treating each child as a sacred public trust.
- Truly cares about people in general and its students in particular.
- Truly prepares its students for life in the 21st century.
- Serves as a model and positive example for others to follow.
- Continually strives to do things in a way that reflects quality and professionalism.
- Continually strives to improve and better itself.
- Is a learning community.
- Is committed to lifelong learning.

Such a vision statement can be used in orientation programs for new staff and at meetings of the administrative staff to focus attention on how they can use these principles to guide their actions. It should also be included in district publications. Embedded in such statements is a vision of what the district is striving to become, which is an extension of the superintendent's intention.



Having a succinct written statement not only acts as a personal reminder of core values but also provides staff with a unifying credo for the organization.

During each year's orientation, one of Steve's intentions was to begin the process of empowering new staff by focusing on their positive qualities. He used the letters of the grading system: A/B/C/D/E to have them guess their common attributes. The preferred answer was: *Able, Bright, Caring, Dedicated, and Enthusiastic*. In this case, the written word was used to manifest the intention of creating a positive culture by telling new staff that such attributes represented what the district sought during the hiring process. The very fact that new employees were selected attested to the fact that they shared these qualities, not only with other newcomers but also with those who were already a part of the school district family.

It is not our intention here to imply that having written intentions should be a unilateral process, although it could be. Most strong leaders use collaborative processes when formulating their intentions and then put those intentions in written form.

### Suggestions for Action

- Use your position to communicate your intentions.
- Create a strategic vision of what your district can become.
- Create a document that paints a picture of the qualities, attitudes, and skills you want to see in the young people educated in your system.
- Strip away the education-ese that's used in many school documents.
- Use metaphor and stories to move people.

## LEADERS MUST ALIGN THEIR ACTIONS AND INTENTIONS

Integrity is about walking your talk, which relates to the alignment between what you do and what you say. Leaders must also have an alignment between their intentions and what they do.

If you have an intention that you're serious about and then behave counter to it, you are certainly undercutting the likelihood of bringing it into reality. At times, most people probably find their intentions inconsistent with their actions. But we have found that when we're in alignment, our intentions tend to manifest themselves very quickly. You, too, can end up seeing some results very, very quickly once you apply your actions to your intention. And so it's again taking it to that next level by saying, "All right, I've got this intention. Now I'm going to act on this intention to make it happen." A lot of effective motivational programs operate from the principle of creating your intentions and then acting on them—and keep acting on them in a consistent manner to make them happen. The fact is if you follow that technique, it's very powerful.

The acting consists of speaking, writing, and doing. Once you have your intentions clear and your potential actions employing those three elements

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aligned with your intention, then you have increased the power in a way that really increases the likelihood you will manifest your intention. There's certainly no guarantee, but when your speaking, writing, and doing is aligned with your intention, you increase the probability of transforming your intentions into something real.

This happens in part because other people are in a position to observe what you say, write, and do in relation to your professed intentions. The more consistent you are and the more resolve you show, the more others can determine the extent to which they identify with and support your stated intentions. When your intentions are honorable and focused on the common good, you tend to increase your ability to attract allies and resources that can assist you in the process of moving forward.

### What Might This Look Like in Practice?

Paul's staff once called him on something they felt he had done in violation of the values he was trying to create in his organization. He could have argued with them about it but instead chose to accept their feedback. He said, "If I stepped over the line with our values, then I was wrong and that's not what I'm trying to create in this organization. Thank you for bringing it to my attention, and I apologize for it happening." It had a cathartic effect with some of the people because it allowed them to say, "Well, OK, he took responsibility for that." By having some way of checking his actions against his words, he was able to move the organization a step forward.

During one superintendency, Paul brought in a consultant who trusted him enough to tell him the truth and what he needed to hear—not what people wanted him to hear—and to identify areas where he might be making mistakes or sending the wrong message. Leaders have to create mechanisms in their organization that allow truth to be told because people sometimes see themselves not as others see them but rather as they'd like to be seen. You may have an idealized version of who you are and what you're about. When you look in the mirror, you may see all the good parts and ignore the bad parts. So how do you get a true picture of yourself? And how do you get a picture of when you're veering off course? If you can't afford to bring someone in from the outside, you can develop trusting relationships with certain people in the organization who will be straight and level with you. You must find people who know that their relationship with you is not predicated on them telling you what you want to hear, people who can tell you what you need to hear and help you see what you may be missing.

One thing Paul did when he was fresh on the job as superintendent was to talk to *everyone* in the district. He found the reaction of the staff members interesting. They would say, "Why are you listening to so and so? Everybody knows he's not going to tell you the truth." His response was, "Everybody but me knows that. And I won't know that until I've heard from everybody out there, and then I'll have a

pretty good idea of who's telling the truth and who isn't and who I can count on in the future to tell me the truth." Only by listening and being open to everyone was he able to sort that out. And sure enough, as he was listening to people, he realized that some people were just telling him what they thought he wanted to hear. Others were very up front and said, "I hope this doesn't offend you, but this is what I think you should know." As strange as it sounds, leaders have to value bad news. If you don't handle bad news graciously, soon you will not get bad news. And it's only by getting the bad news that you really know how you're doing. Only then can you adjust your actions to reflect your intentions.

Another approach Steve has used is to state his intention in an area that involved his own growth and evolution as a leader. For example, he had a discussion with his administrative team about the issue of balancing people's needs in an organization with organizational needs. His intention was that those two dynamics should be balanced, but his actions showed that they weren't. He had a tendency to think about organizational needs before thinking about the needs of people in the organization. Even though he wanted to have a better balance between those two ways of leading, there were times when he was out of balance. So he said to his administrative team, "Now that you know that I want to be more balanced, I'm inviting you to watch me and to give me feedback as to how I'm doing." It was an open declaration, inviting them to supervise him in this particular intention of his. He wanted their feedback to let him know if he was doing better or if he still wasn't getting it right. With their feedback, he was better able to align his action with his intention.

### Suggestions for Action

- Create a cadre of truth tellers within your organization who are comfortable enough with you to say, "You're not walking your talk. Here's where your actions and words are out of alignment."
- Engage in reflective practices such as keeping a journal and then, after some time passes, reread it to see what insights you get that you didn't get at the time it happened.
- Teach higher education classes, which force you to be reflective about the actions you're taking.
- Mentor someone who wants to move up in the profession and allow that person to ask you questions about why you do what you do.
- Create an atmosphere where supervision is mutual and have your staff supervise you.

## ENLISTING SPIRITUAL AND NONSPIRITUAL FORCES TO MANIFEST YOUR INTENTIONS

Leaders would all like to manifest their intentions. Given the obstacles they must overcome, heaven knows leaders can use all the help they can get. By speaking about your intentions and sharing them with the world at large, you can