

The Light  
&  
The Pyramid

*Symbolizing the Paradox of Excellence*

By

**William R. Idol**

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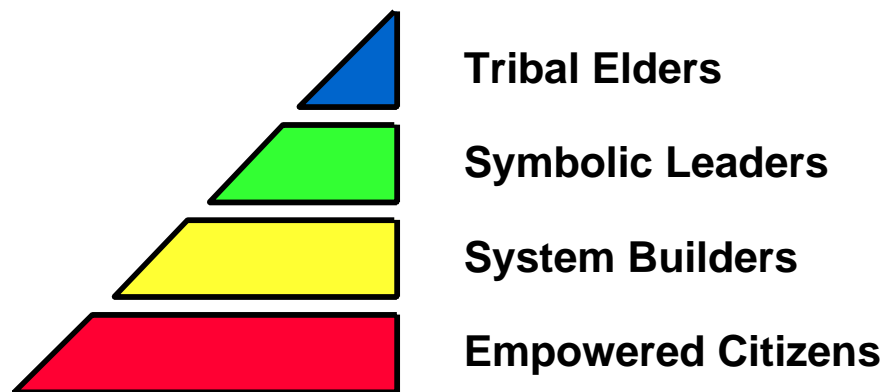
## **The Light Is Vision – It Inspires Purpose that Guides Us**

In many cultures white light has been the symbol of enlightenment and spiritual purpose; we use it to represent the deeper meanings that give an organization its reason for being. For the crusading knight, the light was the reclaiming of the Holy Grail. For Walt Disney World it is "to create the most wonderful place in the world." For a family it is "to celebrate, love and support the uniqueness of each." In the white light is contained the spirit and purpose of our enterprise, the context of meaning that sustains us through the myriad frustrations and disappointments of daily life.

## **The Pyramid Is Structure – It Produces Results We Value**

In our symbol The Pyramid represents the organization (nation, company or family) that can make the light's purpose tangible. The Pyramid is like a prism that refracts the white light into its full spectrum, from violet at the pyramid's apex to red at the foundation. For the sake of simplicity we divide the pyramid into four levels, each represented by a single color. The first is the level of Realities and is Blue. Next is the Green level of Purpose, followed by the Yellow level of Process and the Red level of Results. Each of the four levels makes a unique and essential contribution to the whole.

# Responsibilities of the Pyramid Levels



**Tribal Elders** insist people live the system's Values internally and externally. This **Responsibility for Realities** requires maturity, objectivity and courage. In the US, this function is fulfilled by the **Supreme Court**.

**Symbolic Leaders** align people around Vision, Mission and Values. This **Responsibility for Purpose** requires idealism, insight and on-going communication. In the US, this is the function of the **President**.

**System Builders** empower people to make their fullest contribution. This **Responsibility for Process** requires skills in design, facilitation and teamwork. In the US, this function is housed in the **Congress**.

**Empowered Citizens** produce valued outcomes. This **Responsibility for Results** requires commitment, clear objectives and focused measurement. In the US, this should be the function of the **Civil Service**.

## **1: The Blue Level Accepts Realities**

The blue level of realities is the realm of wisdom, of experience and maturity, of tribal elders. It is the responsibility of this level to be constantly aware of the realities the organization must deal with.

### **We Need Real Information — and the Pain It Brings**

Such awareness requires that two basic functions be fulfilled. First, all relevant information must reach and impact this level without distortion or dilution by other levels. Second, the members of this level must be willing to go through the pain involved in experiencing and accepting — and compelling the rest of the organization to experience and accept — these realities. If either of these functions is undermined, the entire organization is fundamentally crippled because its vision, systems and results will be out of touch with its realities.

## **2: The Green Level Inspires Purpose**

The green level of purpose must be grounded in the wisdom and awareness of the blue level. Purposes that do not spring off realities are often worse than no purpose at all. But they must spring off realities, not be mired down in them.

The function here is one of transformation, of transforming apparent disasters into new opportunities, of inspiring a renewed sense of purpose from failure and defeat. But the power of purpose lies in its ability to command hearts, not minds.

### **Symbolic Leadership Reaches Our Unconscious Hearts**

Words speak only to our conscious minds; symbols speak to our unconscious and the power of our hearts. The green level requires the skill of symbolic leadership — the ability to distill purpose into simple, mythic acts that become guiding beacons for all organizational behavior. As these symbols become woven into the cultural unconscious, those working at the yellow and red levels instinctively know how to manage their systems and results.

## 3: The Yellow Level Develops Systems

The yellow level is where the organization's systems are developed and maintained. It is this level of leadership that either empowers, or undermines, workers abilities to produce results at the red level.

### **The Goal Is Energy Flow**

What these leaders must focus on is process. Systems are structure, and structure is simply anatomy for energy flow. We don't want plants or platforms or computers for themselves; we want them because they structure energy flow that produces results we value. The highest-tech system in the world is worthless unless it channels energy to produce valued results.

### **Systems Must Empower Results**

History is full of glamorous systems (like the Maginot Line) that either never had, or lost, the ability to direct energy productively. We must look at our current business structures and processes — adversarial labor-management relations, huge business units, fear-based motivational systems, period closings — and ask, "Do these structures enhance our workers' results?" And if not, why don't we change those systems?

### **Change = Pain + Purpose**

The reason we don't change obsolete systems is obviously simple: those who must make the changes are not those personally experiencing the pain that makes change necessary. And because the pain is not real to them, they cannot feel the purpose. So they spend their energies protecting turf, not rocking the boat, looking good, etc. In the absence of shared vision, purpose will become trivialized, self-serving and actually destructive to organizational effectiveness.

### **Top Management Is Responsible**

It is not middle management's fault that systems are dysfunctional and even destructive. Top management is responsible because it has either denied realities and muddied purpose, or it has kept the rest of the organization from sharing the pain that would focus and drive the necessary changes. As Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here." If senior leadership does its job at the realities and vision levels (and provides appropriate training), middle managers will design and run systems that support and achieve organizational goals.

## **4: The Red Level Produces Results**

The red level is where tangible results are produced. These are the goods and services the organization provides to its customers.

### **Customers Define Results**

When purpose and goals are unclear, individuals interpret them to suit their own needs and pull the organization in different directions. To avoid such unproductive conflict, clear specifications for goal achievement must be set, and it is the customer who sets those specs. This means all must know who their customers are and what they want. This is no simple matter.

### **Everyone Has Customers**

In most companies it is mistakenly thought that results are the province of production and sales. Nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone has customers and everyone is a customer, and when the process level structures relationships this way, results increase dramatically.

In one plant, the initial operation is the customer for the outside vendor and the supplier to the second operation. The second operation is customer for the first and supplier to the third, and so on all the way to the shipping platform. Everyone knows who their customers are and works with them to make sure the specs are clear – a simple system design, but one with enormous impact on results.

### **The Bottom Line Is Feeling**

The real bottom line is how your customers feel about their entire interaction with you, and the tangible product is only part of this package. We choose restaurants not just for the food and price, but for atmosphere, location and service as well. One waiter's behavior can make or break our opinion of a new restaurant. This is how life works, and the way to succeed is to satisfy your customers in their terms. How do you know if your customers are satisfied? Get them to tell you and listen to their responses both intellectually and emotionally. This is what real market research does, and it can't be done without knowing who the customer is.

# Wisdom Must Be the Centerpiece of Our Leadership

The Light & the Pyramid symbolize old wisdom: Results, like profits, follow from doing other things right, and these "other things" are the leadership functions of the blue, green and yellow levels. As one courageous manager said to his workers, "It's our fault – it's management's fault. We were wrong to blame you. Tell us how to help you produce results..." And, working together, management and workers improved quality and lowered costs, helping to turn around a business in jeopardy.

It is this kind of wisdom we need in our leadership today . . .

***Vision Gives Context...***

*for*

***Facing the Realities...***

*that*

***Energize the Purposes...***

*that*

***Guide the Processes...***

*that*

***Produce the Results...***