



Reveal your authentic self

From the day we are born until the day we die, we encounter a seemingly endless series of wanted and unwanted changes in our lives. How can we discover and develop the resilience we need to live our lives to the fullest, continue making our unique contribution to the world around us and shape our calling amidst constant change?

In a series of interviews, Klaartje van Gasteren, Marnix Reijmerink and Jakob van Wielink – and, for this interview, Michiel Soeters as well – talk to famous international thinkers, all of whom demonstrate that discovering and recognizing our vulnerability allows us to uncover our talent and potential. These are the stories of people who dare to show themselves and invite and challenge readers to do the same.

In this interview, Anselm Grün, the Benedictine monk and international best-selling author, talks about how important it is for leaders to find and live in accordance with their calling.

An interview with Anselm Grün on leadership and calling

I use words to build houses where people feel at home

“A leader must discover their inner calling in order to call others, wake them up and inspire them. In other words, they must be willing to search for and tap into their inner source of motivation in order to recognize talents in others, unlock them and allow them to flourish. In doing so, the leader facilitates results with the joy he introduces into the collaboration.”

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We meet up with Anselm Grün in the Benedictine Abbey of Münsterschwarzach. Upon our arrival, we take part in the afternoon prayer and are touched by the profound silence and the simplicity of the words and songs we hear. During this prayer, we see father Grün moving amongst the large gathering of monks. Amidst the relative anonymity of the community, we have found the man who is arguably the most famous writer-monk of today. Father Grün: the man whose many books about the themes of leadership and personal growth have inspired millions of people from around the world.

No inspiration without emotions

Shortly afterwards, we engage in a warm,

spirited and focused dialogue about a leader's search for their inner voice. According to father Grün, a leader's first task is to facilitate the silence that lets them discover the thoughts and feelings within themselves. “I see too many managers who are focused on the exterior and on finding instruments and models that can help them lead others. That is because they are afraid of hearing themselves and coming face to face with their shadow side. However, that is where true leadership begins. A manager who wastes their energy on upholding a façade out of a desire to achieve perfection fails to acknowledge their inner truth and the wounds it contains. They want to be trusted, but project an air of mistrust. They want to connect, but do not show any

About Anselm Grün...

Anselm Grün (1945) is a Benedictine monk and the author of books about spirituality, personal growth and leadership. He studied philosophy, theology and business administration. As cellarer, he is in charge of the monastery's financial operations and he is responsible for the abbey's twenty businesses and missions. His numerous books have been translated into many languages and attract a readership of millions from around the world.

emotions and therefore cannot inspire or move others. A leader's duty is to learn to manage their own emotions. All too many managers are unaware of the fact that their own negativity contributes to what I call 'emotional pollution.' By keeping their heart open, the leader can keep team members from becoming emotional hostages who no longer feel connected to each other and the organization."

Organizations need rituals

By tapping into their inner source, leaders can facilitate meetings with and between team members. They do this with the help of rituals. "Rituals are like a door that can be opened and shut. In our everyday lives, they help us demarcate the beginning and end of everything we do. With rituals, a leader can contribute to the peace and quiet and security within a team. This allows the team members to experience that they truly belong and matter. From that foundation, they can realize goals together. Being seen is a fantastic motivator."

A leader's calling

For many years, father Grün has been leading the dozens of employees of the organizations affiliated with the Bavarian monastery. His talk of leadership is therefore embedded into his own daily practice. We are fascinated by what he has to say about a leader's necessity to work from their calling. He says: "A leader

who does not work from their calling and is not in contact with their inner source is merely performing their duty. As a result, they cannot be a source of motivation or inspiration for their employees."

What is someone's calling, according to father Grün? Much to our surprise, especially during this interview we come to realize that it is not a purely spiritual concept. Its meaning in the context of developmental psychology is just as important. According to father Grün, it is about two fundamental questions: "Firstly, there is the question of identity. Who am I? How do I live my identity? To find the answers, I have to face my past, acknowledge my wounds and reconcile myself to them. Secondly, my calling has to do with what my purpose in life is. That question is answered in relation to the needs of others. I therefore have to learn to recognize the signs shown to me by the people around me in the various roles I perform in my life."

How can a leader find their calling?

Many do not heed the call that comes from within; instead, they simply do what others expect of them. They adapt and hide behind a façade, which blocks their energy rather than letting it flow freely. As a result, people become exhausted and experience symptoms of stress, burnout and depression.

We ask father Grün how he learned to listen to the call from his inner source and see the signs that the world sends him. He talks about his childhood in post-war Germany. His father worked in construction and decided to move from Essen to Bavaria to build a new life. Peniless, he left everything behind and took his family - including the young Anselm - on an unknown adventure. This laid the foundation for Grün's father factor, which is basically about taking risks and believing that everything will be fine in the end. Father Grün says: "Whereas others recoil in the face of fear, my father taught me to take a step forward instead."

Inner visions from our childhood

“As a child, I wanted to be a mason. I always begged my father to bring me bags of cement, which I would use to build walls. Today, I use words to build houses where people feel at home.” Father Grün did not become a mason. Instead, he joined the Order of Saint Benedict. He felt a calling to do something for the Church. In the late sixties, he began to wonder if he was truly living up to his calling. Over the course of the preceding years, he had largely done what he had set out to do. Now he asked himself if that was it. David Brooks, author of *The Second Mountain*, talks about climbing your first mountain, only to realize once you make it to the top that your work is not done and you have a greater task to perform. Before long, father Grün also embarked on a journey to climb his second mountain.

Second mountain

What does that second mountain represent for him? He explains to us that it all comes down to just three

words: trust, creativity and joy. They are part of the various roles that father Grün plays in his life, including that of cellarer (economist) of the monastery, supervisor of leaders and organizations and author. “I create places where people enjoy working and being, where trust grows and where creativity can thrive.” In living out his calling, he shows others who he is, what he does and what impact he has on the world around him.

Inner visions in practice

Father Grün gives an example of a leader in an organization. The leader feels like he has to do everything by himself. Father Grün asks him – in a manner similar to the one described by Nick Craig in *Leading from Purpose* – what he liked to do most as a child. The leader says that he liked to make little airplanes and later earned his sailplane license. While paying attention to the atmosphere, he learned to chan-

ge his course with tiny alterations. The leader took this image home and later wrote father Grün a letter in which he explained that he had developed a new skill that allowed him to do the same with his team: bring about major changes with only tiny course corrections.

Grün explains that this leader translated his inner vision into a new solution. That was not all, however. The leader also shared the vision with his team. This allowed the team members to discover new perspectives themselves, which in turn facilitated change for both the leader and the team.

About being and doing: identity and mission

Father Grün helps leaders in organizations find and live out their calling by focusing on three key themes. Firstly, there are the aforementioned questions regarding identity (“Who am I?”) and mission (“What is my purpose here?”). “It is important for leaders to

ask themselves what the people around them need and how they - being who they are - can provide that.” Father Grün says the final theme in the search for one’s calling has to do with examining visions from one’s earliest childhood. These are moments and experiences during which we felt joy and desire in a free and unrestricted manner. These inner visions help leaders uncover their deepest drives and talents and integrate these into their daily lives.

Faith, hope and love

“You cannot live and work in a community or organization without forgiveness.” Father Grün talks about the emotions he experiences as a leader himself, such as disappointment, anger and annoyance. “The things we get upset or annoyed about in someone else also live within ourselves; the other person is a mirror for our soul. Through forgiveness, I libe-

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rate myself from negative energy.” Forgiveness, says father Grün, is a journey that takes you past the pain of the emotion and past anger. The goal is to adopt a more objective outlook so you can see that the emotions are about you, not the other person. By acknowledging the wound you suffered, you can begin asking yourself whether you can trust again.

The importance of forgiveness

Forgiveness is important for leaders in organizations; without it, they will poison their environment with bitterness. Emotionally poisoned organizations run the risk of becoming caught up in a depression, as it were. That will result in interpersonal dissatisfaction, a lack of trust, irritation and pessimism. Forgiveness is the antidote to this poison. “You can only lead others if you can feel and offer hope. Leaders must tap into the layer of meaning and enter the arena themselves. In doing so, they challenge others, entrust them with something and stand side by side with them. They give hope and create space for the belief in the “why” of the collaboration. In this manner, employees can form a connection to the organization’s calling.”

Reconciliation and true dialogue

You do not need the other person for forgiveness, Anselm Grün says, but the same does not apply to reconciliation. “Reconciliation is a two-way street.” It calls for a genuine encounter and the ability to listen and speak from the heart. In other words, reconciliation requires dialogue and a willingness on the leader’s part to talk less and listen more to what is actually being said - even if that means potentially exposing yourself to discomfort, pain or even conflict. “You must not set out to be a good leader; instead, you should do the things that make you a good leader. A leader who is not inspired by their own calling when they engage in a dialogue will not be able to truly understand their own and others’ needs.”

Calling as a condition

In living out their calling, the leader chal-

lenges others. They challenge them to take emotional risks from a foundation of *caring and daring*. Those who take more risks achieve inner freedom. In doing so, they contribute to their own and others’ growth. By taking risks in one’s collaboration with others, the security and growth inherent in the collaboration will paradoxically receive a boost. This makes living and working inspired by one’s calling the main KPI (key performance indicator) for an organization. ■

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