

W E R N E R E R H A R D

A Conversation with Warren Bennis on Werner Erhard's Early Work

WERNER ERHARD

The breakthrough required in leadership is not a breakthrough in a new form of leadership, a new style of leadership, new methods of leadership, new ways of leadership, but the breakthrough can be affected by altering the space in which leadership is held. I know that's not clear when I say it in those terms. I'm going to try to clarify that in a moment.

I'm talking about in which epistemological domain, for instance, I'm talking about in which epistemological domain leadership is understood to be located. And I'm describing one epistemological domain, the one which I think will never give us the breakthrough we need, wherein leadership is an explanation, a justification. In the example you gave, for instance, it was a justification for holding back.

Well, wait a second. Here's Professor Bennis. He's the leader here. I can't ...fill in the blank. Or here's Professor Bennis. He's supposed to be the leader here, but he said we're going to do this together, I can't let him fill in the blank. So that's an example of leadership as a justification.

Leadership can also be an explanation.

It can be that thing at whose door we keep laying our failures.

Leadership can also be a set of rules. Well, a good leader would never do that.

So I'm describing not a wrong methodology or procedure, but a wrong space, a wrong domain in which to get at what leadership is and really affect a transformation of leadership that can give us leadership equal to the problems we have.

So I'm suggesting that that domain, to repeat myself the domain of justification, of explanation, of rulemaking, that defines that one sufficiently, I'd like to contrast that with another domain in which leadership could be held, where we simply... this would be a more contextual domain, a more abstract domain, not a more conceptual domain, not more words, more being. In fact, the way I would describe this domain, it would be a domain in which leadership is.

It's a kind of place from which to come rather than something to do or rules of behavior. It's a context which holds what's going on rather than something used to explain what's going on.

Leadership in this domain, rather than justifying something, would leave each person participating with the leadership, as leadership, or with the leadership, nakedly responsible, because the leadership now is no longer useful to justify anything.

It no longer justifies anything. It just is. And as an is-ness, it leaves me responsible for my own way of being and my own way of behaving and my own outcomes.

I can't use it anymore.

So without taking the time I think it would take to keep going at that, that at least introduces my notion about what's wrong with leadership, where what's wrong with leadership is not leadership per se, but the way in which we hold it, the space in which it is, its domain.

WARREN BENNIS

And also the very language of it is a giveaway about what you're saying, I think, superior-subordinate relationships. Not that there aren't differences, but our language is very limited and very hierarchical on that.

WERNER ERHARD

That's a perfect example. That whole notion about superior-subordinate is beautiful in that it sets up a structure of limitations rather than a space of freedom and power.

It limits.

It narrows rather than opening out.

And again, it's not that leadership does that, but the way we hold it, and as you said so perfectly, the way we hold it is demonstrated clearly in the way we talk about it.