

GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP
ASSOCIATES
PRESS

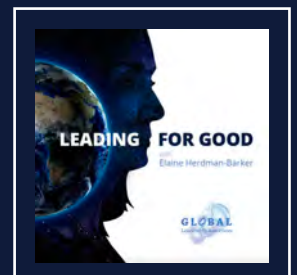
Leading for Good
Podcast Series
Episode 1

The Common Good

Living Well Together – People and Planet

Extracts from a conversation between **Elaine Herdman-Barker**, Chair of Global Leadership Associates and Partner for Mutual Growth and the search for the Common Good and **Leslie Dighton**, Trustee of the Common Good Foundation, Trustee of the International Futures Forum, Emeritus Governor of the LSE, Founder and Chair of Corporate Renewal Associates, Founder of the Chairmans Forum, and author of a series of Little Books on the Common Good.

www.gla.global/leadingforgood



Leslie you are deeply involved in developing the idea and practice of the Common Good.

How would you sum it up?

It's a small question but like all simple things it has a large answer hanging from it.

For a start it's old as an idea. For two thousand years and more, the Common Good has been a concept which philosophers since Plato have thought and talked about. People haven't always agreed and countries have gone to war when visions have got too far apart. For ordinary individuals it concerns how they want to be together in society, what powers they are comfortable passing to the State and the freedoms they want to retain as individuals. It asks how they want to relate as members of their community, and the values they want to live by.

In terms of politics and economics, it comes down to the balance and harmony, or lack of it, between three forces. The powers exercised by the state and its governments, the forces of financial and trading markets, and the space reserved to civil society.

The first two, the forces of state and markets, squeeze against each other together like bellows. Overtime one dominates and then another, while the other

recedes a bit, but they are always both there, the elephants in the room, organising and manoeuvring. In a sense, you cannot imagine a society without both government and markets functioning strongly within it. The question is how strongly? At the expense of what? Both have got much more powerful over recent time. The third force, civil society that acts as the buffer to state and markets i.e. activities and institutions that are nonprofit and non-political, is the one that has got squeezed, eroded and severely reduced by the other two.

So, civil institutions like building societies, communities, parishes, universities, professions, audit, accounting, the boards of companies, care homes, insurance, friendly societies have all got less autonomy now, less authority, less independence than they used to have, squeezed by both markets and governments. As a result values of entitlement and duty, and attitudes and behaviours of those in positions of authority have become more transactional and immediate in their gratification. One consequence is that public trust in leadership at all levels has been seriously undermined.



The Common Good

“The notion of the common good is at the heart of how society chooses to organise itself not just in institutional terms but in terms of values and personal behaviours as well.”

- Leslie Dighton

www.gla.global/leadingforgood



So, is the term
Common Good
universally helpful?

Is it a bit obscure or
smack to some of
radicalism?

It is not always helpful. It can confuse. To be clear the 'common good' is not the same as public good.



Public good tends to be associated with a political ideology of the left.

Private goods tend to be associated with an ideology of the right.



The term 'common good' is not helpful when associated with either of those. It is not that. It is not a political creed in any sense at all. It embraces both the public goods of the left and private goods of the right, and endorses the legitimate roles of markets and governments.

What values are you talking about?

One way of looking at those [values] is from the snap shot that Covid has given us. In the period since the pandemic first struck a whole range of people have come to realise that certain critical things are very important which we had previously become slightly blind to. We were in the full process of globalisation, and we've realised very clearly now that just-in-time and lowest cost economic models, for example, do not have the resilience of networked-relationships. They are immensely fragile. We recognise that cooperation is absolutely critical between humankind of all sorts: nations, individuals, businesses, and markets. Unfortunately, we operate primarily on a competitive basis which promotes a win-lose mentality rather than a co-operative one that offers a win-win outcome.

Another value tends to be around long term versus immediate gratification. So, the common good sees leadership as being a long-term trusteeship rather than something that is measured and motivated towards the immediacy of gain and advantage. It is more concerned with the effectiveness of the whole rather

than simply the efficiency of the parts. It demands, for example, a completely different mentality and skill set to embrace the holistic picture of an organisation and its place in local society or community.

Another big virtue of the common good, perhaps the biggest of all currently, is that nature has been commoditised by the economic and state model that we've operated under. It has become a commodity for use, just like any other factor cost. As a result of that, global warming is occurring across the planet. There are no hiding places. We live now on a very hot and angry planet as nature begins a fight back and to express itself in ways that are potentially catastrophic for civilisation. So, the idea of nature as a sacred partner with mankind is a huge part of the concept of the common good.

I think that this nest of values including nature, labour as a vocation, intergenerational care, effectiveness rather than efficiency, cooperation and mutuality rather than competition, those are the key values that are contained within the idea of the common good.



Are leaders in society, in all their forms, beginning to engage with the concept of the Common Good and address the concerns you raise?

Are we developing a renewed sensitivity to other humans and planet, veering towards warmth over cold-hearted self-interest? Yes, but not enough. We are coming out of a period of roughly forty years of excessive individualisation - on the back of Big Bang in the city, and the market thrust to privatise for gain what was previously mutual on the one hand, and state centralisation for control on the other. The result of that is that civil sector and co-operative institutions run not for profit, and their associated values have lost traction, lost power, lost authority.

Society has become poorer as a result. Interests have become polarised, inequalities more extreme, independent standards have become commercialised, relationships and community impoverished. The pulse of the time is changing. The question is whether it can change fast enough in the face of global warming and the unrest which comes from loss of identity and trust.

It requires every institution, in my view, to repurpose, rethink, reframe its mandate within the emerging new world. That world is going to be very different from the period which we have just been through, particularly nature and the way in which humankind needs to collaborate and co-create in its attempt to redress and take back control of global warming. The minimum requirement is to create the conditions of sustainability that allow all the other common goods, public goods and private goods to flourish.

That is going to require extraordinary acts of leadership on the part of a very large number of people in particular, political and economic leaders. They need to take onboard the idea that there is a new covenant that mankind needs to find with nature, and with itself: in terms of international relations and the predisposition to wage war for gain. It also means a repurposing of mandates by all the critical institutions through which society operates and works, from the religious institutions to universities, to corporate boards and to professional organisations. They all need to reassess what it is they're trying to do in the context of this new world which is emerging. What is their purpose beyond efficiency, worship, knowledge and material gain? How they can best organise themselves, and behave, and what values they should adhere to, to address that repurposed and reframed world?

But it is not just organisational leaders that need to change. All leaders, whether institutional and political, are of course individuals. So, every single one of us needs to rethink the framework of how we are and how we behave, what our purpose in life is, how we can contribute to the quality and condition of the society to which we currently belong and the planet on which we are totally dependent.



Are leaders in society, in all their forms, beginning to engage with the concept of the Common Good and address the concerns you raise?

A useful way to think about this is that every individual, regardless of their material legacy, is born with a private purse, uniquely granted to them, of common goods, and that purse is filled for everybody in exactly the same way, not with gold but with tokens of respect and mutuality, and cooperation, and love, and caring, and duty, and welcome and support.

And it's how we play those cards, each of us every day in our daily lives, that will actually create the accumulative base for a revitalised common good which gives permission and encouragement to institutions and political leaders to exercise the overarching policy reforms and reframing that needs to take place.

This private purse is the most wonderful thing because it's unfathomable, it's bottomless, it's capable of endless use, it costs absolutely nothing, and it is extraordinary beautiful in its ability to accumulate good by extending goodwill and good behaviour to others.



How can we capture the pulse of the time, the human sensitivity to people and the planet to move forward in a less intellectualised way, with more compassion and humility, recognising both our ignorance and curiosity?

Well oddly enough, ignorance and curiosity are a good place to start. I mean the recognition of one's own ignorance that encourages connectivity and the creativity that flows from that.

It will take a turning point in values to move to a more compassionate and humble way of being and leading. Individuals will have their own private epiphanies, and epiphanies come in all kinds of shapes and forms. The 'aha' of understanding when it occurs is one of the most beautiful things to witness. And inevitably it produces the reaction "why on earth couldn't I see that before?"

"Microsoft under a new leader had an epiphany: a moment of revelation. By recognising **ignorance and curiosity and encouraging people to reach across boundaries to each other, it has become infinitely more creative.** One fruit of that has been **a sevenfold increase in the financial value in the last seven years,** which is an extraordinary tribute to **the interconnection between the leadership mode and the financial output.**"

The other thing we are going to have to do is denude leadership of an unnecessary ideology; that running a business means you have to be exclusively focused on immediate financial outcomes. There was a time before the Big Bang, when leaders considered their duty was to the legacy they left behind. It had to be an enhanced quality compared with what they found before. And, that enhanced legacy was not just the balance sheet and the profit/loss account but the quality of human capital, the quality of innovation, the quality of caring and loving in a family of people, and above all its resilience, its ability to stand up to shocks that aren't analytically foreseeable.

So, a measure of flexibility is the way in which resources are used, how their people actually work and operate, and for leadership not to be a proprietary thing but more of a shared process. Leadership, in this framing, is about the husbanding of resources some of them outstanding and some of them quite ordinary, into the best possible combination of talent over time that produces the security and well-being and development of everybody associated with the firm, not just those that work within it, but suppliers, customers, shareholders and, of course, society as a whole. Community, and community relationships, are one of the big areas that firms are right now thinking through as part of their sense of purpose and contribution to their own well-being, and the well-being of society as a whole, and its common good.