



## An opportunity for insight...

From Janet S. Steinwedel, PhD  
President, Leader's Insight

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**"Let your conscience be your guide"**

Has anyone ever said this to you? And, what does it mean? I mean what is your conscience anyway? Where does it reside and where does it come from? I might suggest our conscience is partially conscious and a good part unconscious – meaning we're not really aware of it and what *it* thinks. Well, with all this ambiguity is it any wonder we don't always heed its direction?

Wikipedia expresses conscience as the ability or faculty that distinguishes whether one's actions are right or wrong. It is a person's inner sense of morality. I think most of us would agree with this definition, but still not be quite sure where this inner sense comes from.

In the last few months we might be wondering where some of our leaders' consciences have been - - AIG, Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers and not all that long ago Enron, TYCO and Worldcom, have shown one failure of leadership after another. Now we're facing the breakdown of the American automobile industry. As we "meet" these leaders through Congressional hearings, articles and news programs, I get little sense of their conscience. Do you?

Wikipedia says that conscience leads to feelings of remorse when one does things that go against his or her moral values and feelings of rectitude or integrity when one's actions conform to our moral values. Where is the remorse? (Sounds like a commercial of some years ago... "Where's the beef?" Or, bringing it more up to date: "Got remorse?")

Many of you have worked with me on personal values and clarifying your core values. We've discussed how most decisions stem from our core values — and how, if we aren't sure what those core values are, it's hard to be intentional about making good decisions. To me, our conscience largely reflects our core values. I also think there is an unconscious piece that comes from our understanding of what is culturally appropriate, in terms of the community we are a part of, or the group (team, company) we represent.

Many conversations I have had with you and other leaders have often evolved into discussions of integrity. How can we lead with integrity? What does that mean on a daily basis? On a career/lifetime basis? What is the legacy we wish to leave? How do we market ourselves effectively? How does integrity align with our personal and work goals, and how do we see ourselves?

Allow today's headlines to prompt some valuable reflection: Am I listening to my conscience? What is it saying? Have I shown remorse when it's been appropriate? Am I leading with integrity? Do I live up to the legacy I want to leave?

Perhaps getting closer to your conscience today will facilitate a leadership legacy you — and those around you — can be proud of tomorrow.