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Landry's Bicycles and The Threefold Model

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AS LEADERS IN BUSINESS, WE LIKE TO IMAGINE that we are masters of the universe. And yet our power is partial and control is elusive. In the early years of managing Landry's Bicycles our efforts to get control of the organization were like the comic routine in a film by Charlie Chaplin in which he struggles to stuff a dead body into a bag. The body rebels! Chaplin puts down the arm only to have the leg go up. He puts down the leg only to have the hip go out; he pushes in the hip and the head springs up. Such are the results of viewing an organization as an object and attempting to manipulate the parts without understanding the whole.

In the threefold model, Landry's Bicycles has found a useful tool for correcting our propensity (mostly unconscious and culturally reinforced) to see in one dimension, to focus on one bottom line. The three dimensional model softens and broadens our vision to bring into focus an idea of the whole. Seeing things whole in this way does not necessarily lead to harmony. The demands that spring from the different dimensions of an organization sometimes pull against each other and produce tension. Within the tension, we

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paradoxically discover that what appeared to be in conflict with other values is also acting in support of those values. Frequently, it takes a leap of faith to believe that the tension can turn into support.

The whole of an organization is more than the sum of the three parts. Ultimately, the whole is mysterious. In viewing our organization through the lens of the threefold model, the most significant revelations have come in the shifts of perspective between one dimension and the next and in the surprising substitutions of values from one dimension by values from another. The model helps us shift our consciousness and see better. Through the shifting perspectives of the threefold model we see the familiar faces of our organization change into other faces. These transpositions of the faces of the organization create a stream of sometimes strange (yet telling) connections. The goal is not to separate the three parts of an organization but rather to enter into the slipstream of shifting perspectives as a place where the perception of wholeness can flourish.

Seen as a whole, an organization is a living, breathing, feeling, thinking being – as capable of love and being loved as any individual person. When looked at as a living being, an organization can seem to be looking back at us as if it had a consciousness of its own. We are not masters of the organization. At best, we are stewards. Love (as a pure desire for wholeness, in oneself, in others, in the world) is the great theme of seeing things whole. Love is the underlying mystery of the threefold model. Care for the growth of the people within our organization, desire to serve the common good of our world, and stewardship of our power and money as means to good ends – these are the variations on the theme of love in the threefold model.

Whatever rational process we bring to the use of the threefold model, mystery is still bedrock of the process. The threefold model is not a technique to be tinkered with. Rather the threefold model invites a shift in organizational thought and performance from the idea of optimizing one dimension of an organization to the idea of optimizing the whole – with mutual tension and support among the dimensions. The threefold model gives us a structure for identifying a broad set of values across the three dimensions which – acting together – compose the spirit of an organization.

What follows are a few stories about some of the shifts in consciousness that we have experienced using the threefold model. I hope to suggest just a few instances where the threefold model has led to some surprising revelations, promoted some new

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understandings, and prompted some changes in the way we do things. These instances are but the tip of an iceberg; the threefold model has become a way of thinking about everything we do.

Work as a gift and not as a burden

Among Landry's first engagements with Seeing Things Whole and the threefold model was a temporary trustee gathering held over ten years ago. The gathered group was presented with a challenge facing Landry's. As I remember, the challenge had to do with how to build a viable model of specialty bicycle retailing in a world of increasing mail order, internet sales and "big box" retailing. The challenge seemed to be about how to contend with the strengths of these growing forms of retail: their financial power, operational efficiency, and marketing reach. However, the most significant revelation of the day came as a quiet voice. In the refracted light of the nine lenses – which, as you know, further articulate values within each of the three dimensions – a strangely beautiful wish emerged. One of the participants in the gathering had been given the task of reframing our challenge through the lens of *Envisioning* – a refraction of the *Purpose* dimension. *Envisioning* involves the ways an organization "builds a vision of service for the common good that taps into the life energy of the organization." The wish was simply that "we would come to see our work as a gift and not a burden." This wish deeply moved me and caused one of those shifts in consciousness that I referred to in my introduction. We realized that the challenge wasn't really the internet, mail order, and the "big box," but the nature of our work and the opportunity to see it as a gift. The power of this quiet little idea was immense.

In the months and years that followed, this idea became the "prime mover" at Landry's. I invoked the power of this little idea continually throughout the company. Our imagination about the range of strategic possibilities for Landry's was enlarged by this idea. Looking back, I think of this period as an era of almost infinite possibility for Landry's.

When we thought of our work as being a gift, we also thought of it as a "calling." This sense of calling gave us (at least the illusion of) power and responsibility. We were stewards of something which could – dare we say – save the world. We were given a broad and compelling reason to be! We knew that the world (if not God) needed our work. Our

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work carried within it heroic potential and was worthy of our best efforts. We became a company on fire to get better and stronger and more far-reaching in our thought and action. We saw clearly that we must commit to improving – not only our company – but also the broader conditions for cycling through the political process if need be. Many things happened. I became president of the statewide advocacy organization, *MassBike*. Landry's joined with other retailers in a drive to enlist industry members (suppliers and retailers) in a national advocacy campaign called "Bikes Belong." In addition, Landry's began to support an increasing number of local cycling initiatives – from competitive races to recreational and fundraising rides. Finally, we challenged our suppliers to clarify their vision of how suppliers and retailers – working together – could more effectively build the future of the industry. I'll talk more about that later. All of these broader initiatives were fueled by this primal idea of work as a gift and a calling which came out of reflecting on the threefold nature of the organization.

Core values

Landry's was growing rapidly through the 90's. One of our biggest challenges was how to transmit the "genetic code" of the company to a new and ever expanding number of staff members. We knew that a concern for and understanding of the full range of values must be carried in each member of our company if we wanted to avoid the Chaplin comedy routine of the body rebelling. In conversation with *Seeing Things Whole*, I had been working over a period of years to articulate the principles that had made Landry's what it was. Eventually, we formed a special team constituted of representatives from different areas and levels within the company to work on editing and publishing these values for the company. The *Core Values Team* used the threefold model as a structuring principle. One of the virtues of the threefold model was that it forced us to articulate values which had been previously understated in our company. For example, at that time, we were weak in *Stewardship* values (counter-cultural leaders that my brother and I were). We were not sufficiently concerned or respectful of the need to make profit. The threefold model helped us embrace the value of financial viability as essential to maintaining our identity and accomplishing our purpose.

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We articulated three values under each dimension as a way of reflecting the idea of the threefold whole at our core. (I have attached a copy of Landry's Core Values with this essay.) We expect all decisions to flow from these core values and we expect everything we do to be a reflection of the tensions and the supports among these values. This was one of the first and most important company-wide connections with the threefold model. From there, the threefold model continued to spread to other areas of our life.

Teambuilding

The threefold model spread to our understanding of teambuilding. With this model, we began to see more clearly the importance of complementary strengths in all good teams. We began to pay more attention to the ways different members of a work team were preoccupied with one dimension more than another. We were able to build greater respect for the legitimacy of concerns arising from all three dimensions. We grew in faith that allowing these different values to speak would lead to a stronger whole. We grew more confident that what might appear to be a personality conflict could actually be an expression of values coming from a different dimension by a person with perhaps a greater appreciation of values in that dimension. For example, when we were facing the challenges of rapid growth (expanding from one store to four over five years) I was largely preoccupied with the *Purpose* dimension and the vision of exceptional customer service. My brother, Peter, was more preoccupied with the *Stewardship* dimension and the financial viability of what we were doing. I focused on our vision, our significant accomplishments in sales and our potential for more growth. Peter spoke to the percentage of revenue shortfall compared to our ambitious business plan and pointed to the warning signs flashing on our cash flow model. Regrettably, we often interpreted these differences of view as personality conflicts. Peter was angered by what he saw as my unbridled optimism, and I felt irritated by what I saw as Peter's overly analytical nit-picking and lack of appreciation for my sales leadership. With the change in consciousness brought about by the threefold model, these kinds of conflicts were revealed to be a needless expense of spirit. We now welcome, even hunger for these divergent (yet mutually supportive) perspectives illuminated by the threefold model, and the quality of our teamwork has improved dramatically.

Vision and strategic planning

We have incorporated the threefold model into our envisioning, review and strategic planning processes. We structure annual reviews of each person and each team using the model. We ask each person to review their area of responsibility from all three perspectives (*Identity, Purpose and Stewardship*), listing successes and failures in each dimension. We have developed a habit of envisioning our future with careful attention to the threefold structure, and we make sure that our strategic plan incorporates elements from each dimension.

We have also developed a habit when working on any significant challenge which we call a “strategic walk around.” We ask different members of a team to take a dimension and look at the challenge from that perspective. The team members, in this way, mentally “walk around” the challenge from each of the three dimensions. This orderly discipline tends to generate a richer stream of perspectives and more effective strategies than can be produced from any one perspective.

For example, one of our strategic goals for 2005 was to enhance our mechanical performance and standards with a special emphasis on delivering prompt turnaround for our customers. We formed a new team, the *Landry’s Mechanical Team*, comprised of all mechanics in the company. This was a group of hands-on, practical people, not used to conceptual thinking or strategic planning. Our first exercise was to engage them in conversation around the threefold model and our core values. As we moved into discussion about how to improve our mechanical performance, a sophisticated conversation emerged in which issues arising from all three dimensions were intelligently and respectfully confronted. We ended up with a richly complex strategy that included, for example, a significant price increase to our customers and a commitment to purchase new tools for the shop, to create a program for mechanics to own their own tools, and to pay out a percentage of labor to mechanics at the end of year as a tool allowance. The strategy also included an initiative to provide more training for mechanics and write-up staff and an understanding that we needed to get work done fast when our customers wanted it, even when that put stress on our staff. All of the issues that arise in the legitimate tension between serving customers, caring for staff, and making sure we have the resources and power to accomplish our goals were

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respected and creatively resolved in our planning in part because of the discipline of “walking around” the challenge using the threefold model.

New responses to familiar doctrines of business

One of the most interesting connections with the threefold model is the way it affects our hearing of familiar doctrines in our larger business culture. Our ears have become increasingly sensitive to the corrosiveness of one-dimensional thinking. At some level of consciousness we always knew there was something demeaning about many of the underlying assumptions of our economic system, but the threefold model gives us a theory and a language for describing what is going on. I will describe two occasions where I heard a familiar doctrine of business with new clarity.

The first occasion was a private lunch meeting that I had with Joe Montgomery, Founder and President of Cannondale Bicycles, at our annual bike convention held each year in Las Vegas. Joe was a visionary who had cut his teeth on Wall Street and had then started his own company which had pioneered new techniques, materials, and designs for building bikes. Joe was a charismatic guy who exuded warmth and passion for what he did and infected the people around him with his positive energy. He was also ambitious and eventually took his company public. He had been courting me for some time to help take charge of setting up a national chain of exclusive Cannondale stores. He liked me, because I was a visionary and socially perceptive. However, he did not like my brother Peter, who, as I’ve indicated, was highly analytical, careful about what he said, and prone to long pauses in his conversation with others. Joe had been telling me that my brother was holding me back and that I should replace him.

As Joe and I sat down to lunch, he hunched over, rested his elbows on his knees and leaned toward me:

“I want to give you one piece of advice. Let me tell you, Tom, if I had been given this advice years ago . . . it would have saved me a lot of grief and been worth millions of dollars. I know you are the kind of guy that must love his people. I know, you lead with hugs all around, but here’s my piece of advice, and you can take this to the bank!” (Joe raised his head and looked me confidently in the eyes.)

“Sometimes you just have to be an asshole!”

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I have always distrusted simplistic statements, and this certainly fit the bill. But this voice was not Joe speaking alone. This doctrine is part of the intuitive belief system of our prevailing business culture. The threefold model helped me step back and hear this doctrine in a new way. I believe that what Joe was struggling to express and probably had struggled to understand in his business life, was the tension between *Identity*, *Purpose*, and *Stewardship*. I choose to believe that what he wished he could have said was that sometimes you have to articulate the tension between care for your people, the needs of the company to accomplish its purpose and the demands of financial viability. Sometimes this puts your personal relationship with people in tension with the other two dimensions. That is a fundamentally different statement than the needlessly barbaric statement he made, saying that we should speak or act toward people in a way that is demeaning or dismissive of their dignity. Like many of us in business, Joe needed a better set of values and a better language. In the end, of course, I did not get rid of my brother. He was and is and always will be my soul-mate in business. Joe simply was not seeing things whole.

The second occasion was at a dealer meeting in Arizona hosted by another of our suppliers, Specialized Bicycles. Prior to this meeting, Specialized Bicycles had launched a new line of low-end bikes that was being distributed to “big box” retailers like Sports Authority. Dealers were infuriated and threatened by this. The president of national sales, Steve Meineke, had spun out a vision of how this additional channel of distribution would add to our profitability, and on the final day of the meeting, he gave a speech in which he said, with a big winning smile on his face, “We all know that profitability is the bottom line.”

At that moment I could see that this belief that profitability was the only bottom line was a kind of one-dimensional thinking that had led to a bad strategy for our industry. The threefold model had taught me that one needs to ask the question of profits for what. We had to see our future whole. Indeed, when we say that our work is a gift and not a burden, I believe that it is a gift only when we see it whole. Money divorced from meaning and purpose is vanity. Vision without love or resources is a hollow dream. A company culture of love and care for its members without a great purpose and the needed resources is a walking shadow. Hearing Steve’s words through the filter of the threefold model helped me to speak to Steve and Specialized Bicycles with a new vision that altered our industry.

Reforming the business system

I stood up at the end of Steve’s speech, and attempted to paint a different paradigm. There were about two hundred people in the room – a hundred and fifty dealers and fifty Specialized staff. The paradigm that I portrayed was more or less the threefold model. I said that the profit motives that Steve described were inadequate by themselves. A single bottom line was not worthy of us. We needed to clarify the identity of Specialized and its dealers; we needed to have a clear purpose; and, yes, we needed profits to accomplish all that. Much more was said. It was an emotionally charged speech, but the underlying structure of the idea was essentially the threefold model. This new picture clearly resonated with everyone in the room. At the end of my speech there was a long silence, and Mike Sinyard, founder of Specialized, knew something had shifted in consciousness. He stood up and said, “I think we have made a mistake with launching the new line of bikes, and I would like to meet with Tom and others interested to discuss where we go from here.”

The meeting had run past its scheduled ending; folks were rushing to catch planes, but about thirty people stayed, went outside, sat on the ground, and had a two-hour discussion that led to some incredible changes. What followed was a five year process involving the formation of a twelve person advisory board comprising six dealers and six key executives at Specialized. The mission of this advisory board was to be trustees of our future – Specialized and dealers together building our future. In 1999 the Specialized Dealer Alliance was born, and it altered our industry. Every other supplier had to respond to the new paradigm, everyone was talking about how to improve the conditions for cycling in America, how to build a stronger, better educated, better trained specialty bicycle retail culture, and how to generate more resources to accomplish our mission. None of the major bicycle suppliers dared even talk about multi-channel distribution to big boxes, mail order, or internet. They all focused on partnering with their exclusive specialty retail channel. A new era had begun in the U.S. specialty bicycle industry.

Big “W” work and small “w” work

The threefold model continues to act as a compass for us to correct and adjust our vision. Around 1995, Dick Broholm asked me what dimension was most vulnerable to attack for us.

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At that time, I said it was the *Stewardship* dimension. Today we have developed an operationally efficient organization that has been judged by industry sources as among the best bike shops in America. We have a sophisticated management culture, and we have been profitable seven years in a row. But about two years ago we began to feel a decrease in our sense of joyfulness. Were the fires of our purpose burning a little too low? We identified a challenge this past January at an open forum of about thirty people (a trustee gathering inspired by the strategies of *Seeing Things Whole*). Our challenge was how to bring together the larger mission of our work (that is: saving the world through cycling, or work with a capital “W”) with the small “w” aspect of our work, the ten thousand operational details that we must execute well in our company. Both big “W” and small “w” work are important, but we felt we needed to invigorate the big “W.” It is the threefold model of organizational life that keeps calling us to continually broaden our vision, planning, and action to include a full range of values that are worthy of our best efforts. And this year, following that open forum where we received rich counsel, we have re-dedicated ourselves to bike advocacy and to promoting local riding including the riding of our own staff. We like to say now that work is what we do between bike rides!

A work in progress

Seeing things whole is a journey – not a destination. We still find that we are a small voice in the wilderness of a one dimensional economic system. Sadly, we are also collaborators in that system, and many of our reflexes are still informed by that system, in spite of our purest desire to see things whole. Seeing things whole sometimes estranges us from our unconscious and intuitive functioning. The effort can sometimes seem irrelevant. Almost always in business, I find a tremendous amount of energy goes into simply reinterpreting our language and our reflexes. There is a constant need for retranslation. But inevitably, we have found that when we take the time to enter into the deeper and broader questioning of *Seeing Things Whole* and the threefold model, we receive surprising answers that reinvigorate us, redefine us in new ways that, later, we cannot imagine living without. If we feel that this quest for wholeness seems alien at times, it stems from our own failure as a culture to offer loving criticism and critical love to our organizations and the larger systems of which our organizations are a part. Ultimately, I choose to believe that love and grace reach through all

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things – including our organizations – and that love supreme calls us – not to be masters of these institutions – but stewards of these institutions in the power of love and wholeness.

As I said at the beginning, once one makes the shift in consciousness which is offered by the threefold model, one sees the cross currents of values flowing through all things. It is not a question of playing with a few things; the model calls for a total change. The model is borrowed from ancient traditions of trinitarian thought. By itself it is nothing new, but in the hands of faith that the whole of an organization is part of the greater blessing of life, the model helps us understand how love works in organizations.

I have come to think of the fundamental discipline of seeing things whole and the threefold model as something like prayer – a casting out of mind, heart, spirit, and imagination in gratitude and wonder for the whole of life, and a listening, feeling, seeing as in a dream – opening ourselves to the point where the things of this world see us as much as we see them, where reality and imagination touch, where things as they are and things as they could be join hands. In the end, we must attend to the saving grace of our clearest imagination. The threefold model is but an organizing structure for that interplay. Imagination is the living breath that animates any act of seeing things whole.

PURPOSE

why we do what we do

Customer
as honored guest

Larger realm of bicycling

Committed to
making the world a better place

CORE

VALUES

Quality
of our people

Teamwork,
honesty & respect

Continuous improvement

Trust &
communication

Taking intelligent risks

Long-term business viability

IDENTITY

who we are

STEWARDSHIP

how we get stronger

LANDRY'S

THE LANDRY'S WAY – OUR CORE VALUES

Identity: *who we are*

- Our most important assets are the quality of our people and our reputation as a great place to work. To build a strong Landry's future, it will take all of us together.
- Teamwork, honesty, and respect for each other define how we work together. Collaboration and Landry's mean the same thing.
- Continuous improvement is the shared responsibility of each and every one of us at Landry's. We are committed to positive change, and we are always teaching and learning from each other.

Purpose: *why we do what we do*

- We treat all our customers as honored guests. By doing what is right for the customer, we are doing what is right for Landry's.
- We see Landry's as a vital part of the larger realm of bicycling. We regard our suppliers, industry associations, and competitors as professional colleagues.
- In everything we do at Landry's, we are committed to making the world a better place. We respect the communities we live and work in, we care for our natural and built environments, and we watch over them for the benefit of future generations.

Stewardship: *how we get stronger*

- We advance open communication and trust across all of Landry's, with the goal of sharing clear, appropriate, and mutually understood information. Employees' ideas and common understandings are more important than rank.
- Taking intelligent risks and learning from our mistakes is better than doing nothing at all. Quality is a journey, not a destination — and we're always looking to move Landry's forward on this journey.
- We care for our operations to ensure Landry's long-term business viability for the mutual benefit of our employees, customers, suppliers, and investors. Profitability isn't the only thing, but it's nevertheless a critical measure of our shared success.

Note: If you have any future feedback on these core values, please let anyone in the GMT (Tom, Jack, Peter, or Jeanne) know.