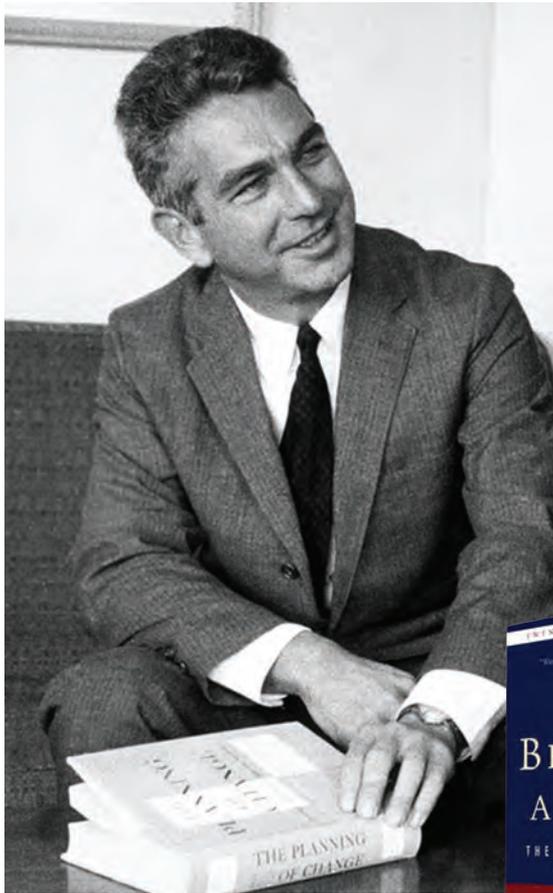


BY KEVIN CASHMAN

# On Becoming a Warren Bennis Leader



**IN OUR WORK WITH LEADERS,** no one has had a more profound influence than Warren Bennis. The breadth and depth of his legacy are too vast to represent here, but his core teachings are clear and foundational.

With his vision of what might be possible by building human potential through an integrated approach to leader development, he broke new ground. At a time when many lived divided lives, thinking that they had to create a “professional” persona for the office and boardroom at the expense of being their true selves, Bennis posited

that “the process of becoming a leader is similar, if not identical, to becoming a fully integrated human being.” To be effective and transformative, we must be whole and authentic. This lesson has been the basis of our “grow the whole person to grow the whole leader” principle.

Bennis was the pioneer who linked self-awareness, the most important tool for authenticity, to leadership effectiveness. Since this assertion years ago, abundant scientific research has emerged to validate what we have seen in the trenches. In fact, evidence, such as the Korn Ferry research by Dana Landis and David Zes connecting CEO and senior leader self-awareness to organizational financial success, continues to grow and forge new breakthroughs. Our work has shown that a 720-degree infinity loop of inside-out and outside-in awareness is the core meta-competency that distinguishes leader, team and organizational success. As Bennis said, “The model of progress is not linear; success is completing the full circle of yourself.”

To be whole, integrated and authentic requires a high level of self-awareness, and that means taking a hard look at your values. Bennis was a leading proponent of values-based leadership — the conscious

comprehension and embodiment of values that determine a leader’s capacity to connect to vision, mission and strategy. One of my favorite quotes from Bennis is: “Leaders remind people what is important.” Given the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity — “V.U.C.A.” — all around us, we need leaders to continually remind us what is important and why. When performance is the purpose, the values of the leader are largely unexpressed; however, when the purpose drives performance, the values of the leader are fully expressed.

Bennis lived a fully generative life. Through his writing, teaching and thought leadership he lived his values and persisted in informing leaders of these core teachings. He equipped us to create a more purpose-driven, value-creating world through whole-person leadership. I hope that our generation and the next are worthy recipients of his wisdom. **✓**

