A nighttime photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, with numerous skyscrapers illuminated. A prominent blue beam of light shines vertically down the center of the image, passing through the text.

Rising to the Privilege of Leadership in the Worst of Times.

by DOUG LENNICK

IT WAS THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001,

a memorable day for all the wrong reasons. Terrorists attacked the United States in an unconventional manner. Part of the attack took place in New York City as two commercial planes were flown into the two World Trade Towers. The towers collapsed and thousands of lives were lost. Osama bin Laden was the mastermind of the terrorists' attacks.

Osama bin Laden was the “leader.”

Ken Chenault was relatively new to his position as CEO of American Express. American Express headquarters were (and are) located in lower Manhattan near the towers that collapsed. The American Express building sustained collateral damage and had to be evacuated. American Express also lost eleven employees who died trapped in the towers. Ken was facing a leadership challenge of monumental proportions, and he rose to the occasion. Ken was the “leader.”

Ken and Osama were both leaders, and yet they were different leaders. Both led with passion, but Ken cared about employees, customers, the people of the country and the people of the world. Osama cared about his cause.

BALANCE REALITY AND HOPE

On September 12, 2001 Ken and I were on the phone discussing the emotional impact the terrorist attack had, and would have, on the workforce. The American Express headquarters workforce would be displaced for several months within the three-state area: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut. Ken scheduled a meeting for all employees to be held at Madison Square Garden.

Ken recently shared the following thoughts about that meeting: “One of the points I wanted to get across was to define reality and give hope,” he told me. (A lesson learned from Napoleon.) Ken also recognized “the need to

demonstrate compassion (because)...the emotions were pretty raw.” He added, “The third, was being very authentic and personal and show both vulnerability and strength.”

Not surprisingly, Ken was masterful at Madison Square Garden, and he was masterful as a leader in the months and years to follow. People, myself included, loved working with and for Ken. Why? Among other reasons is Ken's sense of compassion. Compassion involves actively caring about the wellbeing of others. Ken did—and does—care about the wellbeing of others. We could all feel it. Ken also had—and has—the integrity to define reality while also providing hope. Ken is authentic, and he is personal. As Ken puts it, “Leadership is a privilege. If you don't take the responsibility of being a leader to achieve sustainable success, you won't achieve sustainable success.” Ken embraced his responsibility as a leader, and he achieved sustainable success.

COMMIT TO MORAL PRINCIPLES

Leadership involves both moral intelligence and moral competence. The first is knowing right from wrong. The second is acting on the first. There is indeed a difference between knowing and doing. Moral Intelligence is our mental capacity to determine how universal principles should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions.

When Fred Kiel and I co-authored *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success*, we identified four moral principles necessary for sustainable success: integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. As a leader, Ken Chenault demonstrated all of those. In the preceding paragraphs I highlighted his commitment to integrity, responsibility, and compassion. Although I didn't speak specifically about forgiveness, I can assure you that Ken demonstrated that as well. Ken recognized that forgiveness involved the act of letting go of mistakes...his mistakes or the mistakes of others. Forgiveness is not about approval or giving up one's claim for justice. Forgiveness is about letting go. I personally am fond of saying, "Amongst other things, forgiveness is about giving up all hope for a better past."

Fred and I followed *Moral Intelligence* with *Moral Intelligence 2.0: Enhancing Business Performance and Leadership Success in Turbulent Times*, and Fred subsequently authored *Return on Character*. In our moral intelligence books, Fred and I were able to make the case that the absence of a commitment to moral principles is very expensive (consider Enron, Global Crossing, Tyco, and many others).

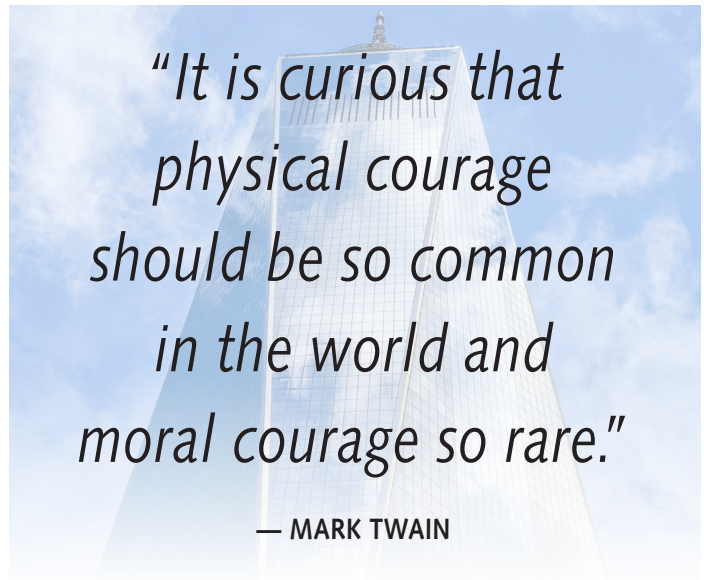
In *Return on Character*, Fred makes the case that the presence of moral principles and competence is very profitable. In a seven year longitudinal study involving dozens of companies, their CEOs, senior management teams, and thousands of employees, Fred and his team were able to conclude that high character organizations led by high character CEOs and senior managers were five times more profitable than lower character organizations.

DEMONSTRATE CHARACTER AND COMPETENCE

The late great Stephen Covey, who I had the good fortune of knowing and working with from time to time, recognized the importance of character in the trust equation. But trust isn't only about character. To paraphrase Covey, trust is a function of character and competence. Having one, doesn't ensure the other. Unless one has both, one can't be trusted to get the job done. For example, I might be a person of high character, but if you're drowning and I don't know how to swim, you won't be able to trust

that I can save you. Or on the flip side, if I'm a world-class swimmer who's been instructed on how to save a drowning victim, yet I lack character, I might allow you to drown.

My colleague Chuck Wachendorfer and I are now working on *Leadership Intelligence*. You can be sure that great leaders including Ken Chenault will be referenced. You can also be sure that we will emphasize the importance of moral and purposeful leadership.



"It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."

— MARK TWAIN

In our first *Moral Intelligence* book, Fred Kiel and I quoted Mark Twain. Twain once said, "It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare." He was right then, and he's right now. Business leaders, government leaders, elected and non-elected leaders, and all people need to step up and demonstrate the moral courage to do the right thing in the presence of competing and difficult to deal with emotions. In the wake of one of our country's biggest tragedies, Ken Chenault proved that moral and purposeful leadership is not only possible, it's essential for sustainable success.

DOUG LENNICK, CEO of think2perform, is legendary for his innovative approaches to developing high performance in individuals and organizations, and for his expertise in the art and science of human behavior. Before founding think2perform, Doug served as Executive Vice President – Advice and Retail Distribution for American Express Financial Advisors (now Ameriprise Financial). His is the author of six books, including *Moral Intelligence 2.0*.