Are You With Us or Against Us?
Being a Socially Intelligent Leader
In a Polarized World

INTRODUCTION

A joke is often told about a group of fishermen who was using dynamite to blast the water and kill the fish. The fishermen was approached by a wildlife officer who informed them that it was illegal to fish in that manner. One of the fishermen lit a stick of dynamite and placed it into the officer's hand and said, "Ok, are you with us or against us?"

It appears that organizational leadership are more and more being placed into the position of the wildlife officer. The leaders often find themselves in a situation where they feel they must join the social consensus of the group or face sudden and obvious leadership derogation. Is this the true meaning of Robert Greenleaf's servant leader where he suggests that the leader exists to serve the subordinates? Often a leader is not in a position to experience the same social issues as their subordinates, therefore, they are not as cognizant of the preconceived schemas that influence the perceptions and eventual actions of their more socially diverse subordinates. While empathic reasoning and organizational support for subordinate's feelings and social concerns is the right thing to do both as a good person and as a good manager, the current article goes a step further by suggesting that today's leadership should seek a competency in the cognitive origins, polarization processes and provocations that lead to social unrest and work to obtain a skill in managing of these type issues why still pursuing the organizational goals and strategic intentions.

In the current article this skill is referred to as "social intelligence." This type of intelligence follows closely with the discovery of "emotional intelligence" from years past. At one time it was assumed that emotions were not and should not be a part of a manager's concerns, however, it became intuitively obvious to social psychology researchers that emotions play a major role in the perceptions and behaviors of individuals. Similarly, social issues and the feelings and perceptions that individuals have of these issues becomes an overriding factor in the perceptions and behaviors of individuals and therefore, can't be ignored in the workplace. "Social intelligence" should be a major part of organizational policies, procedures and long term strategies.