



Living In a VUCA World – Making a Fundamental Shift In How We Think

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After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. Army War College described the world as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The acronym VUCA, created from those four descriptive words, first appeared in the late 1990s. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the term was adopted by the business world to describe the turbulence, chaos, and rapid change that has since become the “new normal.”

Recent situations and events around the globe certainly confirm that we are living in a VUCA world. None of them exist in isolation; they are all a part of much larger and ongoing stories. To name just a few:

- Tens of thousands of refugees flee their homelands for survival. Thousands die en route to a place where they had hoped to at least find safety, if not freedom and a new life.
- The Chinese economy falters, prompting fear and uncertainty, which leads to a ripple effect of big sell-offs and significant drops in financial markets around the world.
- Issues of equality, human dignity, and respect continue to erupt over race, marriage, gender identity, sexuality, and economic status.
- Terrorist attacks and shootings continue all too frequently.
- A polarizing and incendiary U.S. presidential candidate unexpectedly leads in the polls of Republican voters because he says out loud what a certain constituency of the American public thinks and feels.

On the surface, it's a VUCA world. Yet it seems to me that something quite significant is happening underneath all of these situations. Things are cracking open. For some people, and in some cases, whole cultures, it's their fundamental survival spirit or their basic need to be shown dignity and respect, or both. For others, it's suppressed rage, pain, resentment, and fear that can no longer be contained. And for still others, it's their hearts that are cracking open. They can't separate themselves from the pain and suffering of others anymore. Increasingly, their compassion is moving into action.

It's not the first time that this has happened, nor will it be the last. *And*, it's important that we pay attention now. We have an opportunity to make a fundamental shift in how we think, how we view the world, and how we engage with what is going on.

When you break open the dam of feelings and emotions in the human consciousness, the full spectrum of response comes flooding out. The Hermetic Principle of Polarity tells us that nothing can exist without awareness (and perhaps also experience) of its opposite. Love and hate are opposite ends of the same spectrum. Fear and courage form another spectrum as do acceptance and denial, anger and delight, hope and despair.

The full spectrum of human experiences and emotions is so much wider than most of us can begin to wrap our heads around. It's difficult to comprehend the depth and breadth of what our fellow human beings are experiencing. Nor can we wrap our heads around many of the actions that our fellow human beings take. We are indeed living in a VUCA world.

Yet while our heads are easily overwhelmed by all that is happening, our *hearts* actually have the capacity to take it all in.

So here's the fundamental shift available to us right now. If we are willing to step beyond the head's fears, anger, doubts, and discomfort for even just a few moments and focus our attention on the heart, something changes in our awareness and perception. The human heart has an uncanny ability to embrace the full spectrum of what is happening without judgment and, somehow, to begin making sense of it. Somewhere from within our greater knowing, a new level of understanding begins to emerge.

At the most primal level, the head's job is to make sure we're OK. Its instinct is to analyze and control everything that happens in order to ensure our survival. Therefore, the head wants to fix, to solve, and to alleviate our own immediate pain and discomfort. It tries to put experiences and information into boxes and categories – to fit everything into contexts that it already understands. The head needs to make sense of it all as quickly as possible in order to return to “safety.”

The heart's job, on the other hand, is to see the big picture – to take in all that is happening, understand how it all fits together, and show us a path forward. According to research at the [Institute of HeartMath](#), the heart's electromagnetic field of awareness is 5,000 times greater than the electromagnetic field of the head.

The heart has a much greater capacity to embrace the full spectrum of thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as the big picture of circumstances and situations, without judgment. It then integrates all of that information into our awareness and communicates that understanding to the head.

At first, we may experience this communication only as an “inner knowing” to which we cannot yet give words. However, if we'll just be patient and give it a little time, the head will begin to find the words to express our new perspective and understanding.

Our VUCA world presents us with huge challenges, yet also with enormous opportunities. If nothing can exist without an awareness of its opposite, then a challenge cannot exist unless there is also potential for creating a new reality.

The fastest and most efficient pathway to discovering that potential and creating a new reality is through the heart. The heart can show the head a bigger picture. And then the head can organize that new information so that we can move forward with effective decisions and sustainable actions. Heart and head become partners. The key is that the heart is the captain of the ship and the head is the crew. When head becomes the captain, we don't manifest the greatest potential because decisions and actions are taken from a more limited understanding and awareness.

We're not very practiced at feeling deeply in the heart and letting the heart

show us the way forward. As a culture, we tend to become quickly overwhelmed by our feelings and run to the head to “figure out” what to do next.

As a result, two things happen. First, we don’t give the heart a chance to do what it’s really good at – to intuit the bigger picture and bring us clarity and understanding.

Second, we create a split within, further separating head from heart. As that split grows wider, we increase the odds that, at some point, we crack open in search of wholeness. This is what we see happening today. The floodgates holding back human experience and emotion have broken open. The wider that split gets in our society, the more we witness circumstances and events such as we have now. Instead of creating stability and safety, we create a VUCA world.

It’s time for a shift in our fundamental approach to life. At the mass consciousness level, we’re conditioned to live primarily in the head and only occasionally engage the heart to soften the edges. It’s time to turn that around. It’s time to live primarily in the heart, and then, from the heart, engage the intellect to do what it does best – to organize, strategize, and move into effective action based on the big-picture view of the heart.

We can no longer afford to dismiss the power of the heart as spiritual fluff, soft skills, or New Age sentiment. If we want to navigate our way through this VUCA world rather than be trapped by it, we must begin by openly acknowledging the power of the heart to transform understanding, awareness, and perception.

Nobel Prize winning physicist Max Planck said, “When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.” Our job as people committed to transforming our world is not to change *what* people think – it’s to change *how* they think.

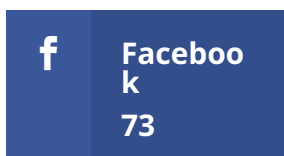
And the fundamental change we can make in *how* people think, starting today, is to begin from the heart. As the heart shows us a bigger picture, our perception, understanding, and awareness of what is happening will expand. And as our perception and understanding expand, we will sense our next steps and move into action.

With heart as captain and head as crew, we have a much better chance of creating a more “whole,” equitable, and sustainable future.

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