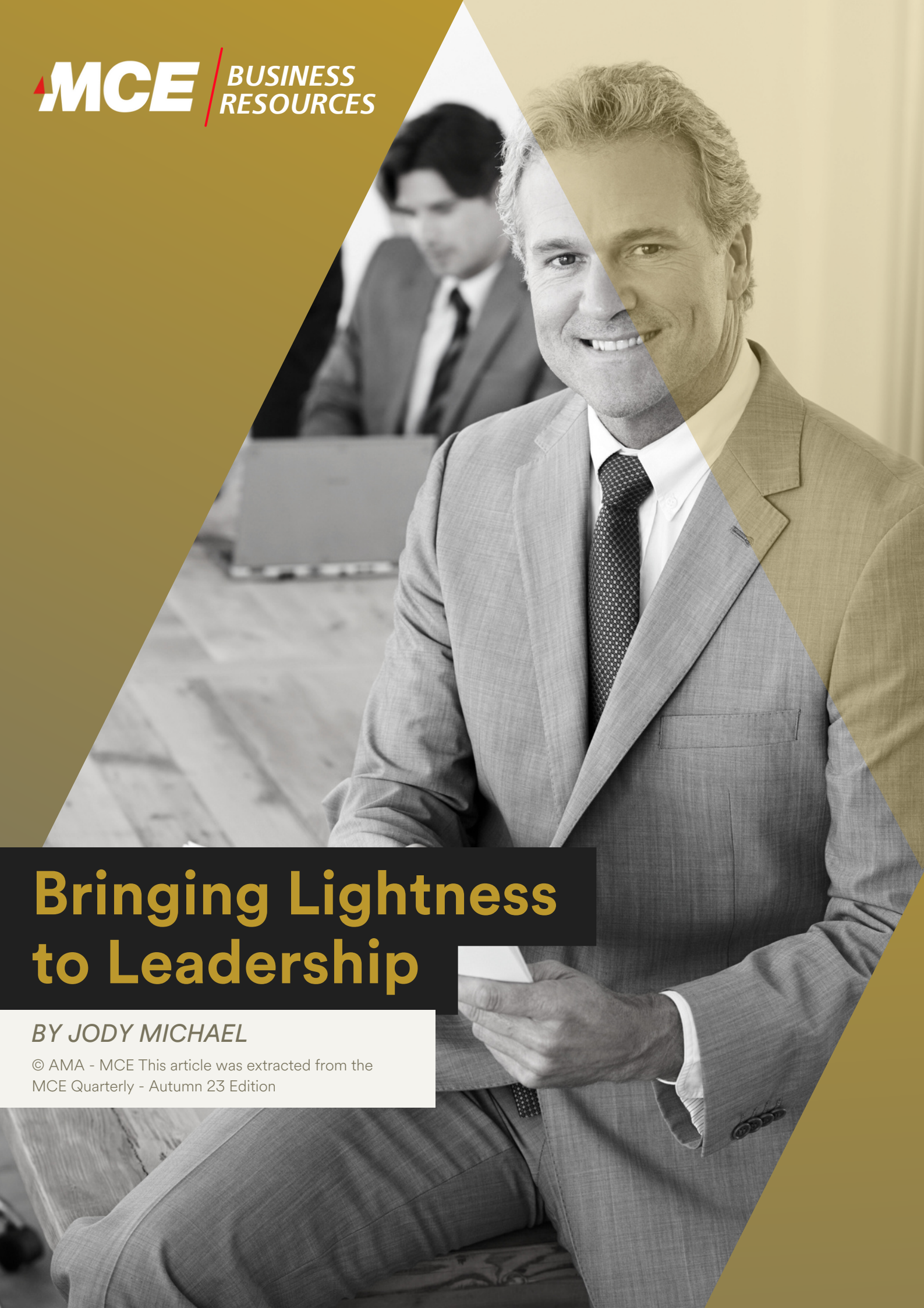


Bringing Lightness to Leadership

BY JODY MICHAEL

© AMA - MCE This article was extracted from the
MCE Quarterly - Autumn 23 Edition





Sometimes you can't put your finger on exactly what you want.

You're trying to make a decision, or determine a direction, or make some kind of change for the better. You search deep inside yourself for clarity, but what you want seems elusive, murky, out of reach. However, you're very clear about one thing: You know what you don't want. In fact, you might have quite the list: problems, people, situations—stress of all kinds. Feelings of frustration, anxiety, or sadness. You just don't want any of that anymore.

If you're a leader in today's world, you might have come to a place within yourself where leadership feels like the same difficult grind, day after day, a mix of stress, overload, and exhaustion. You wonder what could change to make it better. Is change even possible? You ask yourself if this is what leadership is and will always be.

There is an alternative. It's called leading lightly.

THE BASICS OF LEADING LIGHTLY

The funny thing about leading lightly is that in many ways, it's easier to explain what it's not than what it is. That's because leading lightly is a particular way of being—a mood, an energy, a frame of mind—that is quite rare in leadership and among people in general.

Yet, it is very attainable. And it is my sincere hope that leading lightly will turn out to be exactly what you want.

So, let's start with what leading lightly is not. It is not crashing through your day or just going through the motions in suboptimal states of stress, overload, anxiety, or frustration. It is not struggling through ongoing feelings of heaviness, burden, resignation, or burnout. It is not carrying your stress home with you or taking it out on your innocent significant other. It is not fantasizing about quitting your job and running away forever.

What does it mean to lead lightly?

Leading lightly means that no matter what happens during your day, you have the capacity to approach everything with enduring ease and clarity. It is a state of being that naturally arises when you have learned to let go of your internal noise and emotional clutter.

If you think about light or lightness, or moving lightly in any context, you can taste a little of the flavor of leading lightly: It's being light on your feet. Light in your mood or lighthearted. Looking from a well-lit perspective. Having a light touch.

Leading Lightly: A Spiritual Perspective

Most spiritual traditions agree that there is something greater than ourselves at play, something much more expansive and mysterious than the human mind can fathom. “Light” is one of the many names for this, along with consciousness, God, Source, energy, and so on (even “that which cannot be named”). If you are spiritually inclined, then you can understand leading lightly to mean loosening the entrapment of your ego in order to allow more conscious connection or alignment with this greater unseen intelligence or organizing principle.

A spiritual perspective often holds that there is more going on than what we can perceive; that there is something bigger happening in any situation than what our human brain can interpret. The aperture of life is understood to be much wider than the localized impact of any given moment.

From a spiritual lens, leading lightly means getting out of your own way, allowing unfoldment, accepting “what is,” trusting in what you can’t see, letting go of being right, and receiving the gifts that life itself offers to you. Connecting with universal consciousness in this way, you have access to a deep knowing. You can surf the waves, be in the flow, operate more elegantly, make better decisions, help others get through the storm. In other words, you can lead much more effectively.

Turning a lightbulb on. If you’re spiritually inclined, then leading lightly is also about the light of a greater consciousness (see box).

LEADING LIGHTLY IN THE WORKPLACE
In the work setting, leading lightly means that you have the cognitive and emotional (and spiritual) capacity to deal with whatever leadership challenges are brought to you. You’re almost effortlessly effective in each moment with your conversations, relationships, decisions, and other actions. You choose your responses with a sense of mindfulness; you’re not reactive. You emanate a kind of rare receptivity and have a capacity to metabolize the negative, so that you’re not pulled or weighed down.

With each thing that happens, even situations unfamiliar to you, you have an abiding feeling that “you’ve got this.” You’re honed and masterful in moving with what’s happening. It’s not hard for you to know the right thing to do, because you feel it with an unmistakable clarity inside yourself.

Is this a pipe dream? Pollyanna? Something that only a Zen master could hope to attain? I get it. Being able to lead lightly sure would be great—and so would winning the lottery. If you have your doubts, I understand that. As I said, there aren’t many people walking around, at least in a corporate setting, who are leading lightly.

But that doesn’t mean it can’t be done. Most people aren’t even aware that it’s possible. They believe, on some level, that stress and difficulty are just inevitable. However, if you can think otherwise, you’ll learn that even your current doubts are themselves elements of the noise and clutter that are obscuring what’s actually been available to you all along.

Leading lightly comes about from a transformational process that I call MindMastery. It’s a way of discovering, and then shedding, the hidden beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that create your perceptual lens and underlying operating system. It’s not about adding



anything new. It's about understanding how your own unconscious thoughts cause you to react in habitual ways that create unnecessary pain, stress, and suffering.

You might ask, Why, if leading lightly is so great, isn't there more of it in the world? Why would something so beneficial be so rare? It's because there is a kind of unconscious wall that every individual must break through, much like the fourth wall in theater. It's as if we are actors in a play on a stage, but we don't know that about ourselves.

We don't even imagine that there's any other way to go through life. We react to everything from a kind of limited script and perspective. It's only when someone from the outside—the observers in the audience, so to speak—helps us break that wall and see from a different perspective that we can begin to create something completely different. We may choose to stay on the same stage, perhaps, but we have a different experience altogether.

*Jody Michael is CEO of Jody Michael Associates, a premier coaching company specializing in executive coaching, leadership development, and career coaching. She is recognized as one of the top 4% of coaches worldwide and is an internationally credentialed Master Certified Coach, Board Certified Coach, University of Chicago trained psychotherapist, and Licensed Clinical Social Worker. Adapted, with permission of the publisher, from *Leading Lightly: Lower Your Stress, Think with Clarity, and Lead with Ease* (Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2022). Copyright 2022 Jody Michael.*

MCE / KEY FACTS

MCE is your reliable partner for continuous success with agile people development solutions.



10,000,000

participants on AMA & MCE programmes in the last 10 years



92%

of Fortune 1,000 companies are our business partners



96%

of participants report they are using what they have learnt at AMA & MCE



1,000+

expert facilitators globally



100+

Open Training Programmes running throughout EMEA



98

year's experience working with our clients around the globe

For more information please contact:



+32 2 543 21 20

@ info@mce.eu

Visit mce.eu

