

## Whole-Self Leadership

A Discussion with Entrepreneur and YPO Global Humanitarian Award Recipient, Dick Simon

*Dick Simon is a serial entrepreneur who has built and led successful real estate development, hotel, high technology and import trading companies. He is the recipient of the Young Presidents' Organization's (YPO) Global Humanitarian Award and Co-Founder and Chair of the Peace Action Network (PAN). Dick recently spoke with the Hoffman Institute about learning to lead and live with all of himself through his work at the Hoffman Process. **Dick invites other YPO members and Hoffman grads to contact him directly at [rsimon@rsiholdings.com](mailto:rsimon@rsiholdings.com).***

by Ellie Weiser

**Ellie:** Dick, you're a successful social entrepreneur and you're active in the YPO (Young Presidents' Organization), which is a network of CEOs from around the world. Please tell us about YPO and your involvement with them.

**Dick:** YPO is comprised of leaders, CEOs of companies of a certain threshold size who have achieved that leadership at a point before their 45th birthday. It's an international organization that's operated for more than 50 years. Now, including WPO (World Presidents' Organization), which is the graduate organization for leaders over 50, there are almost 20,000 members in more than 100 countries. As they are under one leadership, I tend to refer to both as YPO. I have been a member since 1998.

**Ellie:** YPO's tagline is "Leadership Beyond Business." What does that mean?

**Dick:** YPO was founded with the idea that "it's lonely at the top." From the outside, being a successful leader looks great -- you're running a busi-

ness with a lot of employees, you've accumulated a substantial amount of net worth, you have the image, perks and prestige that goes with all of that. There are, of course, also downsides, including the fact that often you have no one to go to because you have to keep up your game face. People may ask, "How are things?" and you reply, "Things are great," even though you're about to lose your largest customer, the bank's going to close you down, your wife's leaving you and your kids have drug problems. In addition to advice and support about business matters, YPO focuses on being a better person and a better member of your family and community.

**Ellie:** How do YPO members find support?

**Dick:** Most powerful, by far are YPO "Forums" -- groups that all members participate in. In these confidential Forums, 8-12 members meet on a regular basis, generally monthly, to share deeply personal issues and support each other in their life journeys.

**Ellie:** You were responsible for co-creating the YPO Peace Action Network (PAN), based on the YPO



Dick Simon

Forums. What is PAN and what is its purpose?

**Dick:** PAN is an organization within YPO created shortly after September 11th. PAN's first goal was to bring together YPOers from both sides in conflict-ridden areas into Forums, where using YPO Forum methodology, they could talk to each other confidentially, develop deep personal relationships, and work together. We felt that if people in these regions, who are running the largest companies in their respective countries could really connect, it could lead to great outcomes.

**Ellie:** Has it been effective?

**Dick:** It's been incredible! In the Middle East Israeli YPO members meet on a deeply personal level with Arab members from countries throughout the region. We did the same in India and Pakistan, two countries that were inches from a breaking point in 2003, which could have led to nuclear Armageddon. Through the Indo-

Pak Forum 133 Indian YPOers, who owned a significant portion of India's GDP (Gross Domestic Product), went to Pakistan to meet with their Pakistani YPO counterparts and realize that 'we are all the same.' There may be political issues and divisions, but they are resolvable, rather than cause for war and ongoing conflict.

**Ellie:** Did political leaders get involved? When was this?

**Dick:** The India / Pakistan meeting happened in late 2003, when there was very active conflict, no diplomatic relations, and only one open border crossing between the 1.3 billion inhabitants of both countries. We spent three days together, including more than three hours with General Pervez Musharraf, then president of Pakistan. At the meeting the President announced that he would re-open Pakistani airspace to Indian flights, and within a month and a half of our meeting, the President of Pakistan was meeting with the then Prime Minister of India, both referring to feedback they had personally received from YPOers.

**Ellie:** Were you personally involved in the PAN meetings?

**Dick:** Very much so. I've spent most of the last decade helping YPOers and WPOers engage in a range of activities that make a difference throughout the world.

**Ellie:** Are YPO members continuing to facilitate international situations?

**Dick:** Our involvement has broadened to economic development, environmental issues, education, health and helping disadvantaged children. There are more than 2000 YPO

members across the globe involved in what are now called "Social Enterprise Networks." These networks provide the platform for members to work together to make a difference. As an example, members have gotten together to accomplish a variety of aid and recovery activities related to the crisis in Haiti.

**Ellie:** The word 'leadership' typically refers to business. But as YPO/WPO members demonstrate, leadership is about far more than heading-up a board. Do you think our society defines leadership too narrowly?

**Dick:** Good leaders understand that leadership is about a lot more than dictating strategy and efficiently giving people instructions to do things. Of course, a leader has to execute well to make things happen, but the real key to leadership is one's ability to relate to people in a range of different ways. Leading from the head is helpful, but it's definitely not just the intellect. Emotional intelligence and a deep sense of spiritual leadership are critical.

**Ellie:** What do YPO and WPO members get from the Hoffman Process?

**Dick:** Every YPO and WPO member I've spoken with who has been through the Process has come out dramatically changed both personally, and in their leadership style. They can communicate better, and all report feeling so much more clear, with dramatically improved relations with their spouses, children, parents, friends and employees!

**Ellie:** Dick, you did the Process in 2007. How did you hear about it?

**Dick:** I found out about it through

David McCue, a member of my YPO Forum. David and his wife Janet had been to the Process and he strongly suggested that I go. About a week later I saw both of them and mentioned to Janet that David had suggested that I go and asked what she thought. With that she waxed on about how fantastic and loving her husband is -- I mean, she used every loving superlative. So I said "Boy, I've got to get me some of that!" [Chuckles]

**Ellie:** Why did you want to do the Process?

**Dick:** I went for what I call "well care" in three areas. First was that my wife Patty and I were approaching our 25th wedding anniversary and while we had a great life and three wonderful children, I knew it could be even better if we could strengthen our sense of connectedness. The second was that while I loved the work I was doing with YPO and PAN, I was doing everything frenetically and seeing that same pattern in my children. And the third was what I'd call my almost "intellectual curiosity" about spirituality. On all three dimensions, the returns were a thousand-fold what I could have expected.

**Ellie:** Did you change as a leader through the Process?

**Dick:** Definitely. I got a far better understanding of where other people are coming from by being more open and having more awareness of myself, and being able to better hear others and understand their needs and reality. I learned to recognize that a lot of someone's reaction is based on transference. Being able to see and understand transference makes a huge difference in avoiding conflict and communicating better.

**Ellie:** When the dark side stops running the show we can be far more compassionate.

**Dick:** A lot of leadership is about helping people do what they want to be doing. The more one can compassionately understand who a person is and where they're coming from, the better leader one becomes.

**Ellie:** Last year you helped the Hoffman Institute launch our first ever Leadership Q2. Please tell us about that.

**Dick:** In conversations with Raz Ingrasci, Hoffman's CEO, I pointed out that a lot of graduates would benefit from a program specifically for leaders. Hoffman grads are out there leading -- and I'm not just talking about leading in business or formal organizations -- because everyone leads something. These people would like to be better at using the Hoffman tools in their daily leadership activities, and to more deeply embody Spirit-based leadership. So the Institute put together the fantastic Leadership Q2 program, which launched last February in Massachusetts, and was held in September at White Sulphur Springs. It will be offered again in May and November of this year.

**Ellie:** Other than the Leadership Q2, how else can the Hoffman Institute support leaders in being their best?

**Dick:** In Boston, under the direction of the Hoffman Institute and the leadership of wonderful Process teacher Hillary Illick, several Hoffman graduates who are leaders put together a pilot program of Hoffman Graduate Forums. There is a similar group in

New York. These Forums are small groups of graduates with fixed membership (8-12 members) who meet every month or two to grow and develop and support each other in using the Hoffman tools and other important areas.



*Dick Simon and family*

**Ellie:** How does the Hoffman Graduate Forum differ from a regular graduate group?

**Dick:** At a regular graduate group, which is great, people attend when they choose to, whereas this is a fixed membership where you're in, you're committed, and everyone has 100% attendance. For the group itself and the other members, a complete commitment to attend is important. This commitment, combined with total confidentiality and continuity, creates a safe environment for members to bond extremely closely, and share

and work on their most intimate issues.

**Ellie:** Where would you like to see the Hoffman Graduate Forums go from here?

**Dick:** I hope over time there will be a lot more of them. In YPO, almost every one of the 20,000 members is in a Forum and almost everyone will tell you that it's their most valued part of YPO membership. YPO has people with insane travel schedules, but they plan their travel to never miss a Forum meeting because they're so valuable.

**Ellie:** What would you tell a business leader about what the Process can do for them?

**Dick:** I'd let them know that you can dramatically enrich your life experience by shifting your perspective. I'd say right now you're a racing car but you're running on only a few cylinders. Because you're such a good racing car, you can go really fast. But imagine what it would be like if you could get all the cylinders firing! Also, imagine how

much happier you and your family could be, and this is a great way to move in that direction.

**Ellie:** What Hoffman courses have you taken, and what's been the result?

**Dick:** Not only was the Process a life-changing experience, but it was a launching pad for other programs that have taken me even further. I took the Process, then the Q2, then the Leadership Q2. The whole sequence was more than incredible. Now I keep it all alive in my Hoffman



Graduate Forum.

**Ellie:** Was it hard for you to break away from your busy life to go to the Process?

**Dick:** I almost didn't go. Just before my Process I was in the Middle East for PAN, where literally, the Saturday night before the start of my course I'd met with Queen Rania and King Abdullah of Jordan with other YPO leaders. I got home and my kids, who were usually very supportive of my travels, were like, "Dad, you're going away again and we can't even call you?" So I almost cancelled. Thankfully my wife had the intuitive wisdom to say, "You should go." A fellow YPOer and good friend who is a Process graduate said, "Dick, the best thing you could ever do for your family is go." So I trusted and I went.

**Ellie:** Was the Process hard for you to take in because of your intellect?

**Dick:** This friend gave me great advice when he said, "trust the process of the Process," rather than being in my intellect, because I was good at figuring things out (and thinking I might know better). Before going I even

asked him, "Are the teachers really smart, because a couple of times when I had done therapy I couldn't stand when I felt that I was smarter than the therapist!" (Laughter). And with that he said, "Ah, the 'know-it-all pattern.' You'll spend time bashing that!"

**Ellie:** (Laughter). When did your wife Patty do the Process, and how did it affect your relationship?

**Dick:** She did it about a year later, but our marriage started shifting the day I got back. Once I started changing, it opened up a lot of space. One of the things that I've shared with other YPO leaders is that in a family dynamic, it's important to keep your sense of self-importance based on your professional success in check because if you have your family or your spouse always kept in the background, it's easy for them to feel that the relationship is not equal. Through the Process I came to see that if the relationship was structured in such a way that I was always "winning," then Patty was losing, and I certainly didn't want that.

**Ellie:** So you came to experience your

relationship with Patty differently?

**Dick:** After the Process I realized that I had unconsciously set up a family dynamic based on a metaphor of a pond, where the 'winner' was whoever covered more of the surface of that pond with recognition, money or doing 'important things.' After the Process, I realized that, while I was doing activities that I really loved and believe are important, I was so busy that most of my relationships were a mile wide and an inch deep and I saw that Patty had these really deep friendships. Net/net we both had the same amount of 'volume'.

**Ellie:** That's a beautiful way to look at it.

**Dick:** While my kids are still a bit young to do the Process, the shift in our marriage, coupled with Patty's and my individual happiness, has led to an even stronger family bond. I'm very, very grateful and I hope other YPOers, WPOers, and business leaders will feel that their lives and families are worth enough to take the time to find the richness I found -- a richness that goes far beyond a fabulous career.