

Reflections on Integral Leadership Program

By Don Hudson, ITP Integral Leadership Program member

When I signed up for Integral Leadership Program, I was not sure what I was getting into. But from the first weekend when we met in Marin County, CA – I flew cross country for the course – I saw that this balanced program would lend focus on a weakness of mine when I go to trainings – embodiment – and help me examine how a lot of spiritual bypassing had taken me out of body. The IL program helped me realize how crucial embodiment practices are to create a successful life, and how daily practices taught in the program bolster what for me is often a missing piece.



Culturally, I see that many of leaders in professional, pastoral and political positions rely more on our heads than our hearts and bodies, shutting down two of our three centers of intelligence. What the Integral Leadership Program does is engage all three centers, giving you a balanced training and practice to carry forward.

I'll divide my experience of IL into four categories.

First, I learned more about the power of creative visualization when linked to a relaxed body and mind. Every morning we performed the ITP kata, a group of exercises developed by George Leonard that takes about 45 minutes to complete. You start with movement to major muscle groups in the lower and upper body, then move into smaller more refined muscle groups.

This practice helped me focus on a lot of my body's inflexible spots, including hamstrings tightened by years of running and sitting without stretching – not recommended – and helped me address my pain and problems there. Where I felt the most empowered, however, was after this physical practice, where we would settle into meditation and then into a visualization exercise. This helped me focus on the connection of mind-body awareness.

Second, Michael Murphy spoke to us and inspired me to focus on my super-normal experience. Michael remains a visionary in the world of extra-normal experience and in his talk to the group at our third weekend he gave us numerous examples of how people worked with this energy. I had worked with this phenomenon some before but had not heard it described in the world of sports as precisely and accurately as Michael described extranormal experience.

I note this piece regarding sports because I was a sportswriter for nine years, covering the Atlanta

Braves, Hawks, Falcons and SEC and ACC sports in Atlanta. Most recently, I worked in the C Suite of Hendrick Motorsports, a team that has won 14 racing championships. Michael's talk filled in some huge blanks in my consciousness regarding high level performance in sports as well as art and business.

After Michael spoke to us, I got an expanded sense of the possibility of extraordinary experience via opening my mind to a constant connection to the divine and using extra-sensory perception and other techniques to get and stay there. Michael's presence and the research he has funded in this area helped give me confidence to explore the many dimensions of extra-normal experience.

This research and tuning into the channel have become part of my daily practice.

Third, in working the ITP Nine Commitments, or practice guidelines, I examined daily practices that were either sabotaging me or holding me back, as well as cultivating others that have become essential to my being. From watching my diet, to making sure I get some sort of daily exercise before tuning into my higher self for wisdom, I have committed to a daily practice that makes sure I hit the areas where I was weak around embodiment and discipline.

While I was already committed to intellectual pursuits, my daily practice of yoga or the Kata as well as mindfulness and tapping supernatural consciousness have helped me further zero in on my goals and my IL contribution project.

Fourth, I used the blend and mesh exercise taught by our exemplary leadership team on the last day at Esalen to get closer to my father, whose political viewpoints are often diametrically opposed to mine. By working with a non-judgmental attitude and exploring his world with no resistance, I was able to establish a deeper connection with him regarding our points of agreement on certain issues. While I do not think it changed his perception of politics, I think I might have changed his perception of me. That said, where I found the most needed change was in my exposure to daily practice and a commitment to staying in my body when I want to flee into my head. Typically, when I go to retreats, it is always the embodiment exercises that I most resist and try to ignore/skip/ or at least eyeroll into oblivion. What I realize now is that these trainings are often the most important part of any training for me, working on body mindfulness. What I learned from the leadership team with the Integral Leadership Program is that movement and practice that gets me out of my headspace – movement that used to scare me because of an over-reliance on thinking – now liberates me and brings me into the present moment.

One of the reasons sports is so revered in our culture is that it is one of the places where we are totally in the now. So, we crave it, as it takes us into a fully present mind. That said, what I have experienced is that when men sometimes start venturing into the touchy-feely world, it can trigger some discomfort.

But sports can be a touch point back to our bodies, and I have found you are not going to have much contact with your super-normal experience without being connected to all three centers – body, heart and head.

Through Integral Leadership and listening to Michael Murphy's work and dialogue with us, I realized I had to connect to my higher power on a daily basis to have the most powerful connection to life or source energy. What I learned through the IL program was how to anchor my extra-normal experience as well as my more earthly manifestation with a strong daily practice.