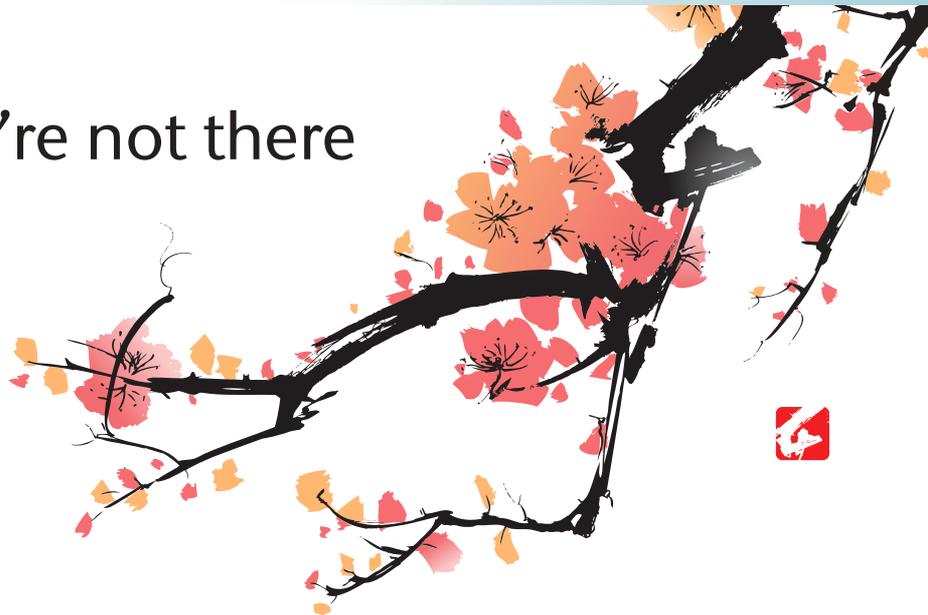


# Leading when you're not there

Waking at 5.30am to the sound of a bell and the fresh morning chill, followed by silent sitting and breakfast and a talk by a Zen Buddhist master is not everyone's cup of tea.

But this is how I and nearly a thousand others from some 50 countries began some sunny summer days in southern France.



The day would flow with a calming mix of meals, talks, group discussions, 'working meditation' of various sorts and slow silent walking on country paths.

I've been to Plum Village in the Dordogne three times before and have always been intrigued by how it all hangs together. How on earth does this community of monks and nuns get themselves practically organised – meet their legal obligations, pay their bills and organise programmes for thousands of visitors throughout the year.

Aha I thought, maybe there are some parallels here with how we charity trustees do governance.

I, and I assume the majority of the esteemed readers of these pages, have not been called to be world spiritual leaders. But we have taken on the mantle of leadership and can learn from those who hold, nourish and grow spiritual

movements by the power of their being and the skill of their words and actions.

Most of us most of the time are not seen or heard by those who follow us. And this presents us with the challenge of leading when we're not there, which is the majority of the time – perhaps some 99 per cent of our waking hours.

Which in turn challenges us to make what we are and what we do when we are there,

to count a hundred fold: every word, spoken or written in emails and papers, every action, the 'big' ones like our demeanour at an AGM and also 'little' ones like a chance meeting with a new member of staff. And by the way we are seen to sort our muddles and how we're seen to help others heal their hurts.

Thich Nhat Hahn who is the founder, spiritual leader and also the legal head of the Community of Inter-Being, is also nowhere to be seen most of the time. But his influence is constantly there in the way people in each of the many communities worldwide make their tea, wash their dishes and interact with each other.

He has created an environment which encourages the mindfulness he teaches. Mindfulness invites us to stop, to calm ourselves and draw on our intuition and insights and then speak and act from there.

Meditation may not be up your street but a meeting with a coach, sharing with fellow trustees, managing your meetings so there is space to think or taking a walk in the park might be.

This may seem obvious – and it is. But a lot of the time we do not stop and think but rush mindlessly into words and action. I know too many chief executives in crisis who have been on the receiving end of mindless words and action of their trustees. Painful.

Much better to be mindful. Not just at 5.30am but all day, every day so we can lead when we're not there. ●

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