Fairy Tales for Executives: Story Telling as a Catalyst for Change

Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries
INSEAD, manfred.ketsdevries@insead.edu

It is suggested that fairy tales provide insights to the reader as they deal with moral, social or existential dilemmas. Similarly, these tales may be used to illustrate how executives deal with the challenges they face in their leadership roles. Archetypal in nature, these tales, with their immediately recognizable dramatics, characters and fundamental moral truths, are embedded in our ancestral human history and serve as the rootstock of most world fiction and drama. As these stories involve the reader or listener imaginatively, they also appeal to our secret selves. And from an existential point of view, fairy tales suggest that the ‘happy ever after’ is achievable. Virtue will be rewarded, vice and foolishness will be punished, and the weak become strong.

This article imparts the idea that fairy tales are a shortcut to moral lessons, providing insights into human behavior. When applied to the realm of executive leadership, they illustrate the dangers of leadership and various ways in which executives can derail. It is also suggested that the psychological healing process at the heart of fairy tales can be a source of inspiration for its reader. In this context, fairy tales can take on a basic therapeutic function, touching on humankind’s deepest fears and desires and helping them integrate these two drivers into a healthy personality. Furthermore, in the article the argument is put forth that the models of the hero or heroine in fairy tales, who struggles and eventually succeeds by taking resolute action, may stimulate executives to do the same. By identifying with the characters in these stories, executives come to better understand their own internal struggles and turn into more self-aware leaders.

Key Words: Fairy Tale; Story Telling; The Heroes’ Journey; Psychotherapy; Dreams; Symbolism; Change; The Darker Side of Leadership.


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“Some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.”
—C. S. Lewis

“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”
—Albert Einstein

Introduction

We all know where we are with a fairy story. There is a cast of predictable characters: handsome prince, wicked stepmother, beautiful princess, the odd dragon, frog, or otherwise cursed beast, and so on. Our hero or heroine is submitted to terrible trials, cruelty and injustice but in the end, the baddies get their comeuppance, good triumphs, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Knowing or anticipating the familiar framework of a story means that we absorb the learning it contains quickly; our mind is open to the message and not distracted or preoccupied by the structure of the tale. In this way, numerous traditional stories and tales provide a shortcut to a moral lesson, and reflections on human behavior. And their usefulness as a literary and psychological device has been recognized since the earliest times and has been perpetuated throughout our oral and written literary history, from
Aesop’s Fables in 600 BC, to the moral tales of La Fontaine in the 17th century and the Brothers Grimm in the 19th, to the pantomime tradition in British theatre, which continues to be universally popular. These archetypical tales, with their immediately recognizable dramatics, characters and fundamental moral truths, are the rootstock of most world fiction and drama, embedded in our ancestral human history. They transcend pure entertainment and, because they involve the reader or listener imaginatively, appeal to our secret selves. Fairy tales help us understand that there’s more to reality than meets the eye and a world of illusion and fantasy beneath the world as we see it. These tales also convey subliminal messages about the universal truths—good and evil, light and darkness, happiness and sorrow—that lie at the core of the fairy tale. This resonance enables storytellers to fulfill their basic therapeutic function—to reflect our deepest fears and desire—helping us integrate them into a healthy personality.

Children learn how to overcome psychological conflicts and grow into new phases of development through their symbolic understanding of the maturation process, as expressed in fairy tales. This is one of the main points made by the child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, first published in 1976. Bettelheim suggests that fairy tales are existential dramas in which children subconsciously confront their own problems and desires on the path to adulthood. Fairy tales help them to answer basic existential questions, like “Who am I?,” “What is the good life?,” “Where do I belong?,” “How do I make the right choices?,” and “What is my calling?” Because fairy tales use symbolic language, they help children discover their identity, their calling, and what they need to do to develop their character further. Thus, while fairy tales do not literally represent the external world, they capture the inner world that a young child does not have language or cognitive structures to understand or control. Through fairy tales, children learn to navigate reality and survive in a world full of ambiguities and dangers.

In comparison, executives, with their seeming mastery of the world, may seem to be an unlikely audience for fairy tales. All I can say in response is that everyone likes a story—and fairy tales more than most—not least because we are all in the process of
constructing our own story, the narrative of our own life. All executive coaching, psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytical interventions begin with the request for the client to tell their story. The format of traditional fairy tales has proven to be an excellent means of transmitting messages that might otherwise fall on resolutely deaf ears.

The stimulus for writing fairy tales for executives was an invitation to do a TED talk. TED talks have a very different format from the speeches I am used to giving at conferences and so on. There’s no time to ramble. You have to stick to the point, as you have a maximum of 19 minutes for your talk. My presentations are usually much longer because I like to tell stories—and I also like to engage in dialogue with my audience when I make presentations.

I was bothered about how to present the essence of what I wanted to say within such a limited amount of time. But the major headache the time limitation gave me was also a blessing, as the challenge forced me to review the way I give presentations. The TED talk taught me something about the essence of storytelling.

What would be the most succinct way to get what I wanted to say across? What did I want the audience to retain? What messages did I want them to take away from my stories? That last question made me think of fairy tales. As suggested, all fairy tales contain a specific, hidden message. Fairy tales teach life lessons, reveal human foibles, and are very often highly moralistic. Like Molière’s Monsieur Jourdain in his play, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, who says that “for years now I’ve been speaking in prose without knowing it,” the TED talk challenge made me realize that all my life—in my work as a management professor, psychoanalyst, consultant, and executive coach—I had been telling fairy tales. Perhaps I should take the opportunity to do it more deliberately.

Fairy tales have always had a great attraction for me. As a child, I devoured one volume of fairy tales after another. I could never get enough of the stories. Now, I had a chance to configure a number of fairy tales for adults, for a specific purpose. My challenge was to create the kind of fairy tales that would appeal to executives and hold meaning for them.
Ancestral roots of storytelling

Storytelling is a universal phenomenon. The cultures in which we live largely consist of the stories people have told about their experiences. Storytelling has always given us a window into our evolutionary history. Since the beginning of time, storytelling has been a community act that involves sharing knowledge and values—a form of communication that evolved along with the human species. Before most people could read or write, the stories told at firesides and in village market places were the way our predecessors handed down laws and values, religious beliefs, taboos, knowledge, and wisdom. Communicating through stories has been one of the most unifying themes in the history of humankind. Before the eighteenth century, in particular, fairy tales were a common source of entertainment for both adults and children—an essential part of daily life.

The stories in fairy tales deal with basic life events, especially coming-of-age processes and the emotional ups-and-downs associated with them. Stories were highly effective ways of mastering the psychological conflicts humans face. Birth, death, marriage, love, hate, fear, joy, wickedness, forgiveness, rejection, and acceptance were regular themes.

Because these stories dealt with the most basic elements of human existence, the same types of story were passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation over widely divergent cultures and periods in time. The similarity of these stories reflects the underlying cultural dynamics that are shared by all cultures. Just as stories about strange real-life experiences are told and re-told, the classic fairy tales familiar to most societies came into being through the same tradition of repetition. In spite of many variations, the main themes of these stories remained very much the same.

Storytelling has not lost its value as a fundamental human activity even in our digital age. The stories that reflect our cultural heritage are as relevant today as they were generations ago. Through them we tap into the wisdom of the collective unconscious that derives from our ancestors’ cultural heritage. Influenced by these stories, and guided by the archetypal characters represented in them, we can figure out what kind of people we are,
and who we would like to be. There is a sense of cultural communality, in that the modern teller of a tale, by telling it, is linked to everyone who has told such stories before.

Many of us fail to realize, however, the extent to which stories influence our behavior and shape our culture. Yet even though we may not be aware of it, stories drive everything we do—how we think about our past, decide on our present, plan for our future, regulate our conduct, and even define our personalities. We gain a sense of who we are by listening to stories, telling others stories and building an interior narrative about the things that happen to us. From the point of view of human development, each of us is a storyteller at heart. We are the heroes and heroines of our own life narratives. Stories help us to find our way through the maze that is our life’s journey.

**Seeing one’s self in fairy tales**

The themes of traditional fairy tales and the way they are constructed dramatize the issues that preoccupy us. Each character in these stories portrays a state or condition of our own nature, consciousness, and emotional and spiritual development. We engage our imagination when telling or listening to a story, and begin to develop thoughts, opinions, and ideas that align with those of the storyteller. In this way we step out of our own shoes, see things differently, and experience empathy with the hero or heroine of the story. Because of this, the stories we hear can have a powerful influence on our beliefs and moral values.

Our identification with the protagonists in traditional tales is simplified by their one-dimensional characterization. They are simple, clever, ugly, beautiful, poor, rich, wicked, or kind-hearted. Precisely because these tales do not explore deeper dimensions of human experience and relationships, they gain in clarity. Not only are their descriptions rather superficial, the heroes, heroines, and villains of these tales are usually also nameless (maiden, woodsman, goblin, king, queen, big bad wolf), or given token names (Jack, Snow White, Prince Charming, Wicked Stepmother). The illusion created is that the hero or heroine could be any one of us, and that strange and wondrous things could happen to
all of us.

The magic of these tales is built on abstraction. They have non-specific settings (the forest, a castle, a land far, far away), polarized characters (entirely good or entirely evil) and most importantly take place “once upon a time,” which needs no further precision. All these things are instantly understood by all of us. Their lasting appeal attests to their richness and effectiveness as methods of symbolic and aesthetic communication.

Most of us first encounter traditional tales in childhood but in fact they are far from being stories just for children. They are encoded with spiritual and moral lessons for all of us. They help us understand that conflict is followed by some kind of resolution; they teach us that there is always a way out. In this way, they provide us with a safety net. Through fairy tales, we form a concept of how the world works, and what our place in this world should be.

The ”Other World”

Fairy tales explore the boundaries between reality and fantasy and between the animate and inanimate world. In these tales, the most amazing things happen: animals talk; people turn into animals; fairies are helpers; goblins create mischief; dragons and other monsters lie in wait for us; and there are miracles just around the corner. When we enter these “other worlds,” there is the expectation that we will return to our own world with a new awareness, and with a new sense of energy, and hope.

Also, the perception that fairy tales are intended for the young is relatively new and has been reinforced by the Disney effect. These sanitized cartoon versions of classic fairy tales stripped the originals of much of their complexity and sensuality and in the process lost a considerable amount of their symbolism. Most of us are unaware of the darkness of many versions of these tales, having been dazzled by the Technicolor versions with which we are familiar.
Fairy tales are one result of our struggle to control the bestial and barbaric forces that are part of the human condition through metaphors and symbolic narrative. They are the closets in which we keep our deepest secrets and fears. Think how many fairy tales dramatize some of our worst fears: abandonment, sibling rivalry, starvation, cannibalism, murder, rape, and incest. It’s no wonder that the fairy tales we are told as children mark us for life. But reading or listening to these tales allows us to work through these fears and learn about what’s right and what’s wrong. From an evolutionary psychological point of view, fairy tales may have been a developmental necessity, enabling us to master the challenges that life had in store for us.

Structural patterns
Most fairy tales start with the protagonist leading an ordinary, unremarkable life. To add to the sense of drama, our hero or heroine may have had an inauspicious start in life, being poor, bereaved, abandoned, imprisoned, mocked, or pitied. Yet he or she may be yearning for something more—a desire that we can all identify with. Early in the tale, the hero or heroine receives a “call” to bid goodbye to this dull life and embark on something exciting but unknown. Frequently, the protagonist resists but the pressure is on, the “call” cannot be ignored. Once the protagonist answers the call, there is often a period of preparation.

The time has come for the protagonist’s heroic journey, away from humdrum daily life to a land of adventure, trials, and magical rewards. Crossing the threshold into this other world is about taking risks and pursuing a quest. The hero or heroine is tasked with performing an extraordinary feat—like slaying a dragon or spinning a room full of straw into gold.

At this point in the tale, our protagonists face life-threatening dangers—journeys through pitch-black forests surrounded by wolves and bears, across treacherous mountains, endless deserts—or have to make superhuman efforts to fulfill their destiny. They encounter dragons, giants, goblins, wizards, witches, and trolls. Fortunately, however, the
very act of crossing a dangerous threshold attracts helpers in the form of fairy godmothers, kind strangers, and animal guides, who may appear in disguise. These guides or mentors help our protagonists overcome the dangers they encounter and succeed in their quest.

The most intense and dramatic part of the journey—the trial—has now arrived. The ability of our protagonists to complete the quest is challenged. To pass these tests, they must draw on the skills and insights they have gained on their journey. They will emerge triumphant, as transformed individuals.

In all these fairy tales, the protagonists survive not just the perils of the magic world but those encountered on their journey into their inner world. The figures and imagery in the tales—the wicked stepmother, fairy godmother, darkness, forest dangers, and magic mirrors—may symbolize disturbing inner emotional states. Having overcome various challenges, very similar to rites of passage, the protagonists metaphorically “return” to the place where they started. They re-enter the “old” world, but they have changed profoundly. Things will never be the same again.

Many fairy tales can be interpreted as dramatizations of our inner darkness, allowing us to acknowledge and confront it. The deep, dark, dangerous forests where we get lost stand for the near-impenetrable world of our unconscious. Although the dark forest is an unknown place, inhabited by wild things, it is also a place of opportunity and transformation where we will find our true selves.

Then there is the happy ever after. Often the first glimmering of hope comes at the very apex of catastrophe in these tales. When all hope seems lost, the prince arrives, the villain makes a mistake, or the heroine returns from the dead. In fairy tales, there is a reward in the end, the humiliation or death of the villain, marriage to a prince or princess, and kingdoms or treasure to be granted.

**The hope for transformation**
If there is one clear constant in the fairy tale, it is transformation. These tales demonstrate that change is possible if we prepare ourselves for it properly. Personal transformation is one of the key themes in fairy tales. All the main characters in the most famous tales are transformed in one way or another. If we feel ugly, we can become beautiful. If we feel powerless, we can become powerful. We may be poor, but we can become rich.

The real power in these tales lies in the narrative device that goodness conquers evil, and that even the darkest experiences and greatest setbacks will lead to a “happy ever after.” The protagonists in these stories overcome all challenges and trials and become wiser, stronger, and able to deal with every kind of danger. Fairy tales teach us that if we are smart, honest, generous, modest, and kind, we will succeed even when it seems all hope is gone; that personal transformation is possible for all of us.

To illustrate this point, let’s look at one of the most famous fairy tales, Cinderella. This poor girl endures the direst circumstances—neglected by her father, starved, abused and bullied by her stepmother and stepsisters, forced to drudge for everyone—yet a miracle occurs and the drudge is transformed from a downtrodden domestic into a captivating princess and the cherished bride of the prince. The incidental schadenfreude of her sisters’ humiliation sharpens the delight of the tale. This dynamic occurs frequently—beasts and frogs are transformed into handsome princes, snow babies become real, live children. These tales suggest that everyone, no matter how humble, can be elevated. No wonder that such a message has universal appeal. No wonder that we all love fairy tales, with their suggestion that similar magic is just around the corner for us. If fairy tales do their job properly, they help us to lose ourselves in another world where we experience a sense of wonder, mystery, and excitement in such a way that we return to our day-to-day world transformed for the better.

**Symbolism and dream imagery**

Some experiences in life seem like setbacks or hang over us like dark clouds and our first reaction is to wish to avoid them. However, in hindsight, we may come to realize that these experiences have been extremely valuable. They might have forced us to develop
aspects of ourselves that we had neglected or to enter the wild places in our inner world that we had consciously or unconsciously avoided. In these wild places we also meet the frog prince, the wise old man, the goose that lays golden eggs, the wolf disguised as a sweet old grandmother, the murderous giant, the evil goblin, and the cannibalistic witch.

The symbolism in fairy tales is sometimes quite subtle or extremely subliminal; on other occasions its rawness is very obvious. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung viewed fairy tales as the purest and simplest expression of psychic processes of the collective unconscious, as they represent archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. Deep dark woods full of wild animals are common representations of feared or negative elements within us, the unexplored side of our nature that can be dangerous and chaotic—elements that sometimes surface in nightmares. Jung insisted that something valuable might emerge from these dark places. This wild side of our nature is an important and in some ways the most creative part of us. Our challenge, however, is to integrate this side into our identity in a constructive way.

There is also a great deal of communality between dreams and fairy tales. Like dreams that scare us but also prepare us for the realities of life, fairy tales warn us about the dangers we may encounter in real life. If something weighs heavily on our mind during the day, the chances are that we will dream about it, either specifically or through symbolic imagery. Dreams are a form of private theater that enables us to solve problems more effectively while we are asleep than when awake—in a dream state we make connections more quickly than when we are awake, and there is less conscious censorship. Fairy tales perform a similar function: they are a kind of collective theater, enacting dramas that we all recognize and share and that help us remain sane. In this way, fairy tales and dreams fulfill an important societal function. They give us experiences we can’t have in real life, in particular situations that could be dangerous or problematic, and teach us how to avoid them.

Whatever our culture, fairy tales teach us valuable life lessons. They put ordinary people in extraordinary situations. Their depictions of miraculous events, encounters, and
experiences remain a valid part of the human experience. They are an invaluable part of our shared and personal history. With their symbolic language, the fairy tales that we first encounter in childhood retain their power over us, even as adults.

The fairy tale in the leader’s journey

Spiritual growth is at the heart of every fairy tale: as the protagonists leave their (happy or troubled) home to face and eventually triumph over difficult challenges, they are expected to develop their highest potential. Leaders face similar dilemmas. In many ways, leaders can be viewed as the heroes and heroines of contemporary fairy tales, given the fantasies we tend to project onto people in positions of power and authority.

Many of the life lessons provided in fairy tales illustrate the major “dangers” of leadership. One of the most famous is Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of The Emperor’s New Clothes. The Emperor in this tale is like many of the leaders we encounter. They can be intimidating, even frightening, but when we study them more carefully, we realize that their power and authority have no substance—they are like the emperor who has no clothes. In another example, the Wicked Queen in the tale of Snow White is like an aging leader struggling with generational envy, unable to let go. Fairy tales can be read as maps of success and failure—how to live as safely and happily as possible, and how to avoid making fatal mistakes when taking decisions.

Effective organizational and political leaders should be able to take care of the basics: they need to help their people make a living, direct them to overcome the competition or “enemy”, and maintain harmony within the organization or society. They are merchants of hope. They speak to the collective imagination of their people to create a group
identity. Conversely, dysfunctional leaders will lead their organization or society into chaos, their people into misery and hardship, and bring discord.

Fairy tales can be used as a medium to decipher the conundrums faced by leaders and give us a rich opportunity to explore potentially conflict-ridden issues. They can be highly illustrative ways of learning how to deal with the challenges of an executive’s world. These stories can have a much greater impact than the content of many conventional books on leadership, most of which send us to sleep rather than having the power to delight or touch us and teach us universal truths.

As a device, fairy tales are more likely to stimulate our imagination, clarify emotions, and suggest solutions to problems and anxieties. The roles of king, queen, prince, princess, and others can become avatars for the challenges faced by people in leadership positions. There are also similarities between events in the world of fairy tales and what happens in organizational life (quests, challenges, glittering prizes, succession issues, battles to be fought). Presenting the dilemmas of leadership in the form of fairy tales can be a very powerful catalyst to help leaders change—because, as we have seen, fairy tales always have human transformation at their core.

Storytelling is also an extremely powerful weapon in a leader’s arsenal. Using their people as an audience for their stories, leaders can illustrate the kind of challenges they are up against, convince them to take a certain path, and illustrate the consequences of good and bad behavior. As leaders use stories to learn to manage their own leadership journey, they can also tell stories to their people to assuage organizational anxieties and provide direction even in difficult times.

The five deadly dangers of leadership
In my TED talk, when I wanted to present the essence of leadership, I decided to recount a number of tales to highlight the most deadly dangers that I believe executives face. What are the things they really need to attend to? What are the biggest pitfalls they face? There are a number of issues executives need to address to deal with the fundamental
issues associated with the leadership mystique. These tales are written in such a way to make executives aware of the dangers they will encounter on their various quests. To summarize these deadly dangers:

- To start with, why do some leaders succeed and others derail? What differentiates effective and ineffective leaders? Why do bad things happen? Thus the first danger many leaders are prone to is lack of self-knowledge.

- The second danger is hubris. Many leaders become too arrogant and lose touch with reality. Why do so many leaders self-destruct in this way?

- The third danger is a leader’s inability to get the best out of people. Ineffective leaders fail to stretch the people who work for them. They don’t know how to make people better than who they think they can be.

- Linked to this danger is the fourth and greater danger, which is a leader’s inability to create well functioning teams. Effective leaders are aware of and accept their personal limitations and surround themselves with people who have the strengths they lack, creating executive role constellations of people with complementary characteristics.

- The fifth danger is creating an organizational gulag—what is it that prevents leaders building great places to work? Why are there so many places of work that stifle people?

These five deadly dangers can be dramatized through the traditional medium of fairy tales. The messages contained in the tales can be seen as warnings of what can go wrong for people in a leadership position. However, they are also intended to inspire hope and the belief that something better can be achieved. Reading fairy tales with open ears and heart may help leaders understand what they can do better.
While reading these fairy tales it is helpful to reflect on your own responses to each tale. How does the tale make you feel? Is there something in the story that strikes a chord? Do you recognize any of the characters? Do you recognize any of the challenges? Does your organization seem as if it is under a wicked spell? Or is your place of work on track to its happy ever after?

None of us is ever too old to believe in the magic of these stories, which continue to resonate in the human psyche. I believe even the most hardened executives will find it difficult to resist the pull of the alternative worlds described in fairy tales that address these issues. In using this medium, fairy tales provide an encouraging model for living, reminding us unconsciously of life’s possibilities. The “happy ever after” is not a conclusion but a doorway to a more hopeful reality. These tales not only teach us lessons about the external world, but also give us the opportunity to embark on an inner journey. I contend that only by confronting these dangers head on can people in leadership positions grow emotionally and spiritually.

**Explorations of the interior**

The mythologist Joseph Campbell wrote in his seminal work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*: “The happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth, and the divine comedy of the soul, is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man.” Resonant with these observations, at the heart of each of these five fairy tales is a personal developmental task: As the protagonists leave their old lives behind and enter the unknown, to face and eventually conquer the various challenges they face, they are expected to develop their highest potential. Therefore, for the heroes and heroines in these fairy tales, the quest is first and foremost an inner journey to discover what they are all about, and what truly matters to them. Through this process of self-examination they will discover the inner awareness that enables them to lead themselves and by extension, others.

My primary aim in using fairy tales for the boardroom is to emphasize that mastering of the art of leadership comes with mastery of the self. Developing leadership is a process of
self-development. To conquer the self, as various fairy tales demonstrate, leaders should not shy away from difficult personal challenges. Only through meeting these challenges head-on will they grow emotionally and spiritually.

The use of fairy tales also shows that developing leadership capabilities is about much more than learning the latest management theories. A leader does not just need the right tools. To be an effective leader, we need to recognize our own unique capabilities and passions. This implies that we have to learn how to use ourselves as sounding boards for those around us, be in tune with our surroundings, and understand others and ourselves. Only when we know what we want to do, and why we want to do it, will we be able to accomplish anything of meaning. Fairy tales encourage willing leaders to embark on their own inner quest and make a difference.

Given the early imprinting of fairy tales in the human psyche, it is also my hope that the fairy tale when told will retain their power for an adult readership and will still capture the readers’ imagination. My wish is that the psychological healing process at the heart of fairy tales will be a source of inspiration for every reader, and resonate with executives in any context, as well as the boardroom. The models of the hero or heroine in these tales, who struggles and eventually succeeds by taking resolute action, may stimulate emerging leaders to do the same. Although fairy tales take us into imaginary realms, peopled with talking animals and a variety of monstrous beings, I think readers will recognize the connection with the real world throughout their telling. In identifying with the characters in fairy tales, the reader comes to understand their own internal struggles between good and evil. From an existential point of view, all these stories declare that the happy ever after is achievable. Virtue is rewarded, vice and foolishness are punished, and the weak become strong.

The most enduring question in philosophy, religion and psychology is about the meaning of life. In the words of Mark Twain, “The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” In life, what really matters is that we have the chance to be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming. One
of the greatest human fears is that at the end of our life we might discover that we have never really lived. We all have the urge to live fully, to do something significant, and to make a difference. Our biggest challenge is to work out how to do it. In summing up, my hope in writing fairy tales for the board room is that it may provide the reader with a modicum of insight of how to make a difference—and in the process, by avoiding the five major dangers of leadership, to become a truly fulfilled leader.