

"Secular monasteries to help leaders get back to what truly matters"



By **Sebastien Henry** (*L'Express - Express Yourself*) published October 3, 2013

According to Sebastien Henry, a leadership development specialist, today's managers need to "reconnect to themselves". To help them do so, our contributor proposes creating a network of secular monasteries near major cities around the world.

"These places will allow them to stay several days, either on their own or with a team, and help them reconnect to themselves and to nature through simple but proven techniques", he explained.

The intense search for a deeper meaning among a growing number of **leaders and managers**, combined with the gravity of worldwide critical indicators such as collapsing overall biodiversity, growing inequality in global resource allocation, and government body paralysis, requires more **innovation and decisive action**. The objective? To radically transform **the role** of today's business leaders.

One such initiative is to create a **network of "secular monasteries"** located near the world's economic centres (within a 30 or 40-minute drive). These places are intended to serve as bridges between wisdom and business and to encourage leaders to **get back to what truly matters**.

Business leaders can stay at these places for several days, either on their own or with a team, to **reconnect** to themselves and to nature through simple but proven techniques. Here, they will be able to **reflect deeply** about the meaning of their work and, as a result, redefine their priorities, in order to return to work with a renewed quality and scope.

"They combine simplicity, restraint and healing."

There are already many peaceful places to stay around the major cities in which the world's issues are discussed and decided. But, to my knowledge, there are very few whose purpose is to sound the alarm and **awaken** us to what truly matters with the strength and depth required today.

Undoubtedly, traditional monasteries come closest to meeting this need, with predominantly Buddhist ones in Asia and Christian ones in the West. They are typically located in the middle of nature, hosted by a community united by **shared**

ethics, combining simplicity, restraint and healing.

Even though they still have an important role to play, they don't seem to be able to address the **challenges** facing the majority of decision makers today. In our increasingly secular society, many leaders and managers hesitate to visit them because of their **religious background**.

There is, however, a great need for places that maintain the essential character of monasteries, yet do so within a secular framework so that all leaders may go there, including those who are not part of any kind of institutionalized religion.

"We must provide extraordinary places to the most determined"

To those who may consider this project too ambitious, remember that men in the Middle Ages constructed hundreds of monasteries **in the West** at a time when the technical and financial means were much more limited. **Bernard de Clairvaux**, for example, helped to establish nearly sixty, between the 12th and 13th centuries.

A first "secular monastery" will soon be established close to Paris. Other sites are being explored in other cities of the world in order to quickly **build a network**.

I often tell myself that future generations will consider our era as a time of **spiritual crisis** when we had completely lost sight of what truly mattered. Today, some tens of millions of people enjoy more material prosperity than ever before; yet thirst for meaning, while coexisting with many billions of their own kind who struggle daily for simple survival.

We are betting that talented and enthusiastic business men and women can play a major role to help us escape this **collective madness**, provided that they finally start listening to what is truly important. To do so, we must provide the most determined leaders with **exceptional places** where they can be nurtured and inspired.

About the author:

Sebastien Henry is an entrepreneur, author and leadership development specialist.