



THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP AND LIFE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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This month I attended the Georgetown University alumni conference for graduates of the Leadership Coaching program. In addition to the exchange and presentation of many new ideas and technologies, we were privileged to have a presentation from David Whyte. If you have not read any of David's work, go straight to the book list in this month's LEADERBOARD and order anything there immediately!

What follows is a compendium of ideas, concepts and processes that struck me as useful for consideration during the holidays. None of these are treated deeply here; however, if you desire a conversation about any of them, please feel free to call or email. It is my hope that one or two of these will stick with you for the holidays.

IDEAS AND DISCUSSIONS

GRATITUDE: I had an interesting conversation with a coach from New York who works a lot with the concept of gratitude, which certainly seems timely for the Thanksgiving holiday this week. He focuses on developing a feeling of gratitude in executives for their position as opposed to feelings of entitlement. A leader who is grateful for the organizational power and influence he or she has uses that power and influence differently from one who feels entitled to it. Understanding the impact of gratitude is a critical piece for leaders who want their actions and decisions guided by a desire for positive and lasting change.

BROAD VS. NARROW: David Whyte spent some time describing the somewhat ironic situation of colleges and universities, as well as corporate recruiters on campus: They are looking for breadth in life experience in candidates; however, everything from that point forward is about limitation. New employees are given narrow roles and asked to leave more and more of who they are out of the workplace until they begin to separate from the parts that make them whole and nourish them. Soon those activities are relegated to evenings and weekends, then just weekends, then just vacation. The higher up the organization we go the more technically specialized we become. Then, when we are asked to lead, we are finally promoted into the realm of human relationship where all of who we are is needed to be effective. This might be at the core of why leadership is such a challenge for so many.

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WORK STRESS: A researcher who analyzes risk factors for heart conditions and events (a clinical term for heart attacks and other debilitating emergencies) reported that the original list of over 40 questions used to estimate risk 30 years ago has been vastly edited. The major factors are now down to only 6 questions, and the first on the list of high risk indicators is... "Are you happy at work?"

PRESENCE: Athletes, performers, surgeons and writers often report very specific rituals used to get fully settled and ready to do what they do. Watch Tiger Woods on a golf course, and especially as he goes through his pre-shot routine and you will see the power of these routines. Yet, most of us come to work without designing or creating that conscious shift for themselves. How might your day or your key meetings be different if you had a formal way to bring yourself fully present for the work in front of you? For a clear and powerful example, read the section titled "What I Do" in *The War of Art*, by Steven Pressfield.

LANGUAGE: We learn certain language as we grow in managerial responsibility. Yet we are asked to take on leadership roles, which require a different language, without training or time to develop new vocabulary. Imagine your experience of trying to live in a foreign country without having time to learn the language before going. Here is an example: A manager who works for a VP calls asking for help with a problem. It is a very familiar conversation. The issue has come up many times in the last year. The parental power based language that first comes to the VP's mind is, "How many times have I told you...". A new language, centered on developing independence might be "Does this look familiar to you?"

POWERFUL QUESTIONS AND IDEAS: David Whyte, is a poet. Yet, he is employed by some of the largest and most successful corporations in the world to help build into their cultures and practices the ideas and concepts he explores in his poetry. Here are a few questions or statements that stuck with me from his work:

- What questions do you need to be asking that have no right to go away?
- Any real marriage, piece of sacred work or project that is important to you will break your heart. If it does not, you are not truly engaged in the process.
- The soul would much rather fail at its own life than succeed at another's.
- While parts of us may have made a transformation, other parts are quite happy to remain where they are. And those parts wonder who granted permission for another to go exploring in the first place.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS: One of my client organizations has adopted the label of courageous conversation for a difficult meeting when negative feedback needs to be given or a breakdown needs resolving. David Whyte introduced a whole other definition with what he calls the Five Courageous Conversations we need to be having as essential to the art and discipline of leadership.



1. What is the courageous conversation we are not having with the unknown future – the world that lies over the horizon, but has not yet been fully articulated?
2. What is the courageous conversation we are not having with our clients or the society of which we are a part? This in effect is the future, *now*, the currents of people and events that flow around the organization and the endeavors of the individuals who make it up.
3. What is the courageous conversation we are not having between the different divisions and the international cultures within the organization? What prevents us from taking another step in working together?
4. What is the courageous conversation I am not having in my immediate workgroup or with my immediate superiors, associates and subordinates? What is the courageous conversation I can personally initiate to start thing moving in this immediate circle?
5. What is the courageous conversation I am refusing to have with myself, in my own heart and mind with regard to my work and the present life threshold on which I find myself?

I hope that some of the thoughts and ideas here provide ideas and concepts you can sit with over the holiday season. Each is just a beginning, a conversation starter designed to open your own exploration. Happy Thanksgiving!