Leading an Undivided Community

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My leadership philosophy can be summed up in this quote: “Leading is giving. It is an ethic, a gift of oneself to a common cause.... Without giving there can be no real leadership. The essence of leadership is not giving tangible things or even inspirational visions. It is offering oneself and one's spirit" (Bolman & Deal, 2011, p. 122). It is through the giving of myself as authentically as I can that I create not only successful organizations, but also organizations that are kind to the human spirit. The essential quality of any leader is to do the inner work by connecting to the Spirit of God within us, and then allowing that Spirit to work in and through us in an interconnected web on community that grows and evolves as the people within the organization do. Through transformational leadership that moves toward the logos, creating a culture of trust, and being mindful of the symbolic and cultural frames, I create organizations that honor the inner life of people and inspire them to express the fullness of who they are.

The key to transformational leadership is to focus on my own inner growth first. The fundamental option says that the less embedded I am in my usual ways of being, the closer I get to an authentic connection within to my inner teacher (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, p. 6). Transformational leadership starts with me long before I lead anyone else. It is about my own inner deepening first. I can either choose to move closer to the Divine through my own spiritual practices or further away from it in my own embeddedness in my own belief system.

In contemporary moral theology, there are basically two fundamental options, or stances: yes or no towards life, the authentic self, God. Given this concept, an individual act can be characterized as good or bad not only because of the nature of the act, but because of the individual person’s orientation toward or away from God, which orientation the act both represents and effects (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, p. 5).

This connection to logos, rather than my own belief system, allows openness, creativity, and self-acceptance. When I allow that connection to logos for myself, then I can also encourage and allow that connection for those that are working with me. It is a matter of my own conscious choices that determine my authenticity and others ability to be in relationship with me.

Given that leadership is a matter of consciousness, it becomes all the more key that the leader makes a choice of how he or she will work: through empowerment, collaboration, and dialogue grounded in a fundamental option for self-transcendence, or in oppression, control, and manipulation flowing out of a fundamental option for self-embeddedness. The difference in choice produces a difference in results: leadership is transforming only when it results in a shift in consciousness for the follower, and it is moral only when that shift is upward toward greater transcendence (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, p. 4).

I move others forward only by my own transformation first. “Authentic leadership, then, implies a self-transcendence that comes only with genuine self-enlightenment, and that is the product of patient psychological reflection, or spiritual grace, or both” (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, p. 4). So step one in being a leader is to do my own inner work and to create a life that will sustain my own inner connection to my soul long before I can shift and change anything else.

 Creating a culture within an organization that is open to authentic communication and learning is the second key to my leadership. Building trust begins with the leader first because it is the leader that must show their humanness, vulnerability, and extend the authentic communications first. “Building trust is a process that begins when someone… is willing to risk being the first to open up, to show vulnerability, and to let go of control. Leaders go first” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 222). Once I have created this authentic communication, I then make sure that I create an environment that is safe to make mistakes because innovation and creativity are stunted in environments that expect perfection. Leading by example to take risks and fail is part of the growing process for me and give permission to others to do the same. “Without mistakes, they’d be unable to know what they can and cannot do…. It is failure which breeds success” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 200). Allowing people to be themselves and do the best that they can in a supportive environment creates a space for authentic community to emerge.

 To me, community creates the culture of any organization. It is my job as a leader to do my own inner work first because authentic community cannot exist if I am divided within myself.

Community cannot take root in a divided life. Long before community assumes external shape and form, it must be present as seed in the undivided self: only as we are in communion with ourselves can we find community with others. Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of the personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships (Palmer, 2007, p. 92).

We know this community can only be created in relationship with each other because that is how we gauge the nature of reality. According to Parker Palmer (2007), "The hallmark of the community of truth is in its claim that *reality is a web of communal relationship, and we know reality only by being in community with it*” (p.97). This concept is backed by the cultural frame:

The organization is a culture through which meaning is constructed for participants…. organizational culture is made up of the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by the members of an organization…. organizational culture is reflected in the observed behavioral regularities, norms, values, philosophy, rules of the game, and feeling or climate of the organization (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, pp. 30-31).

Culture is constructed by the people within the organization through their shared beliefs. Additionally, I also set the tone for the overall meaning and purpose of the work within the organization. “The symbolic frame focuses on how humans make sense of the chaotic, ambiguous world in which they live. Meaning, belief, and faith are its central concerns. Meaning is not given to us; we create it” (Bolman & Deal, Reframing Organizations, 2013, p. 244). We are the creators of the culture of the organization and the meaning that we derive from the work we do in that organization. I shape that culture and meaning by leading with example of being open, honest, human, and moving toward logos.

 Through the fundamental option toward logos, the creation of culture, and the mindfulness on how to create authentic community, I lead my organization by doing my own inner work first. If I can be authentic, real, open, honest, fallible, and then I help to foster an organization that is honest in what it is and who is there. When I do that, I create an organization that is home to the human spirit. Parker Palmer (2007) writes,

We share responsibility for creating the external world by projecting either a spirit of light or a spirit of shadow on that which is other than us. We project either a spirit of hope or a spirit of despair, either an inner confidence in wholeness and integration or an inner terror about life being diseased and ultimately terminal. We have a choice about what we are going to project, and in that choice we help create the world that is. Consciousness precedes being, and consciousness can help deform or reform our world (Carey, Blackboard Learn, 2015, p. 13).

I choose to lead by going to the inner life first to determine the consciousness of my outer world.

# References

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