



Our Star

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Dear friends and colleagues

The tragedies of September 11th raise enormous questions for all of us. These are questions on a grand scale – what our country should do to respond to the attacks, why our country was attacked in this horrible way, how we repair the emotional and economic damage. We will all be involved with these questions and ambiguities for a long time, and we are all suffering today in some way as a result.

Being a leadership consultant, I found myself reflecting on some of the work I have been trying to do with others in the last few years. I could not help but feel that right now, when things seem groundless, leadership is needed more than ever on a very local, immediate, person-to-person level – whether as leaders we are part of organizations, communities, families, or just trying to lead ourselves as individuals toward a better world.

I began to pull together some of the materials that have meant most to me personally – materials that may be of assistance to others deeply interested in their own leadership. What I've tried to do is assemble these materials, including some excerpted writings from others, into a coherent whole, editing and rewriting some parts to help people work with their own changes and feelings in a rapidly transforming world.

I've named this compilation, "Our Star," based on the line in the first verse of William Stafford's powerful poem about community, "A Ritual to Read to Each Other." This poem has been quoted widely in the days since the attacks. None seems to capture better the challenges we now face together.

*If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.*

Please feel free to copy this material or use it in any way you like, passing it along to anyone you think it might be useful to. I greatly value your comments and your personal connection. My contact information is on the last page.

Best wishes

Dan Oestreich



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Cycles of Change

*“There are no events but thoughts
and the heart’s hard turning, the
heart’s slow learning where to
love and whom. The rest is merely
gossip, and tales for other times.”*

Annie Dillard
Holy the Firm

Introduction: Responding to Tragedy

These materials are not just about what happened at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and in a field in Pennsylvania. They are, for the most part, general to the art and craft of leadership. In fact, beyond this introduction, there isn’t much about the current tragedies. But this writing would be remiss without a few words on what leaders might do in a common sense way to help alleviate immediate and continuing pain. In the wake of the attacks, we are now also faced with lay-offs and other economic fall-out sure to have a disruptive impact on us.

It seems to me the only real wisdom is to connect with other people. A valued mentor once told me there are two kinds of grief: bearable and unbearable. Unbearable grief is suffered alone. When there are others to share it, we can hold grief better, even when it is very heavy.

Of the things a leader can do, being **visible and connected** when difficult things happen, is the most important. Just checking in on people, being present, making eye contact, talking and showing respect, paying

attention to how others are reacting – all of these things can be of great service. There was a website that showed pictures of people all around the world responding to the tragedy by holding vigils and placing flowers and candles at American embassies. A few nights after the attacks, the maker of the website reported he had received *10,000 emails* from people appreciating these pictures. That's the value of being connected in a gut way to others.

Sometimes the immediate, person-to-person connection is mostly about **warmth and presence**; sometimes there isn't even a need to say much. I read somewhere that when people are suffering and a Zen master is nearby, the master often has little or nothing to say. But he or she will be present, sitting quietly in a corner, invisibly holding others up when they are feeling shaky.

Sometimes it is about **asking and listening**, hearing what has happened to people. Years ago, I worked with a fire department renewing some of their human resources systems. I learned a lot about the work that firefighters and paramedics do. Some of it is quite grim and personal burn-out is always a risk. What I learned about burn-out is that it comes from trying to bear the grief alone, not allowing it out, not telling the story. Keeping it inside is like planting the seed of a poisonous weed and waiting for it to sprout, but we do it because it seems like a good way at the time to avoid pain or to be heroic. If a firefighter has been inside a burning building where people have died, the best thing for that person to do is talk to someone, reliving the whole experience. Peers are taught to ask, "What did you see? What did you hear? What did you smell?" In this way, the trauma the person might be experiencing, even if that individual doesn't quite recognize it as trauma yet, begins to be relieved.

You may have already called people together for a moment of silence or done other things to help people recognize and grieve what has happened. You may now wonder if it is a waste of time for people to talk about where they were and what they were doing when the

World Trade Towers were struck by aircraft, or share their memories of the images they saw, such as people leaping from buildings. But this can be an important part of doing our best to get rid of the shadows lingering in our bodies and minds. As other jolts come, perhaps as a result of America's response to the attacks, or perhaps as a result of our economic situation, letting people talk together about what has and is happening to them will be essential. Don't expect the tensions to simply or easily subside. It will take awhile for confidence to come back.

There's a **balance** here in encouraging people to move ahead, to "get back to the job" or "to get back to 'normal'" and supporting the gradualness of adjustment. Connection is such a sensitive process. Everyone responds in a different way. I don't think we know exactly what to expect or what the answers are. Loss leaves us in empty space, and it is this empty space, this ambiguity that makes leadership rather than managership so important. If there were an easy path, we'd be taking it right now.

Leaders shouldn't try to fill the empty space. But they can help people share it with one another and **help the human connections hold**. That will be important work because the tough stuff is just beginning, the shock is wearing off, strong emotions, divided opinions and beliefs about what to do are surfacing. And this process of **polarization**, without leadership, can be extremely destructive. Polarization is about taking sides, and so it can easily rip at the fabric of relationships, whether of a family or a country. As I read the op-ed articles and letters to the editor in my local newspaper last Sunday, it was easy to see the forces of polarization in action. On one side, some people encouraged a quest for deep understanding of America's impact on the world and why the tragedies had happened; on the other, some expressed plain bloodlust to the point of creating a war cry to destroy Afghanistan, turning it "into a parking lot." So while we are all waving a flag these days, underneath this are divisions, and these divisions, fueled by sadness, fear, and anger, will be something we'll have to learn how

to handle together. Over time the ambiguity of the world situation and economic pain may well continue to drive anger and polarization. At the least, we should expect people to be nervous at some level for quite a long while.

For now, the best thing may be to try to really understand the **Cycle of Change** people are going through. A version of this cycle is something that you may have already seen before in a workshop or training program, so this may be in part a review. These models are popular because working with the losses of “imposed change” – words that far too euphemistically describe what happened on September 11th – is so intrinsic to what individuals, teams, families, organizations, communities naturally experience and must face. In America, because we believe strongly in youth, growth, and winning, we can have real problems accepting disillusionment, mortality, and losing. Rather than trying to apply this cycle specifically to the present tragedy, the language I’ve chosen to use in this and the following sections is simply about leadership and life. Perhaps in this way, the content will have a broader context and more enduring value. You should find it easy enough to make all the connections to current events you need.

In this same way, I want to also share thoughts about **authenticity and courage** and about **community**, topics that are all about creating a good country, a good company, a good team or family, a good life. They are about finding the nature of our own leadership and maybe, if we are lucky and skillful, how to help people come together rather than polarize.

It is my fervent hope that our joint leadership – yours and mine -- isn’t just for America. It’s much too late for that and this planet is far too small. It is clear there has been a change. Leadership, as much as we might need to protect our own or love our land, must now also **serve the whole world**. I don’t think we really understand yet what this means. It’s the undefined “star” that Stafford talks about in his poem. This star is part of the startling and stark emptiness of the present moment.

It is part of a new world-wide landscape. Today, leading in a way that serves the whole world is a gripping, raw, confused, tense, and shapeless responsibility – and I believe we may have a limited amount of time to learn how to do it. We'll need each other, we'll need voices from everywhere around the world, to help us learn how.

“What needs to be done right now [in America] is to recognize the suffering, to embrace it, and to understand it. We need calmness and lucidity so that we can listen deeply to and understand our own suffering, the suffering of the nation, and the suffering of others. By understanding the nature and the causes of the suffering, we will then know the right path to follow.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk/teacher

"So for a good six months solid I was ragging on Morty and slapping him around. And one day I give him a belt as usual for the pure pleasure of watching him cry, and something in his eyes-- it came through like a rocket, this is the moment of my life. I said to myself, almost out loud: Morty feels just as bad as I do. I'm six, seven years old now, so I mean this is basically $E=mc^2$ for somebody at that age-- and I don't know, that young, you have to say it was only a feeling, but I knew then everybody's got this, what I felt, this hurt, everybody has it somewhere in their heart. And I knew that I'd never really get away from it, and neither would anyone else. And life bears that out, doesn't it? It's being poor, or being alone, or being sick, it's not being loved enough or not loving the way you want to, it's feeling you're the doormat to the world, or a mean crud, or just not quite as good as the people you want to be like or be with. But it's always something, and it's devouring, for most people, this parasite always eating a hole in their hearts.

"And I wondered, I wondered and wondered why. Why did God make a world where everybody's heart is in pain? And hanging with Morty, looking at him, you know what I figured out? The answer. I mean, I think I did. You know why it's like that? So we need each other. So we don't just each take our guitars and go off one by one to the jungle and eat the breadfruit that falls off the trees. It's so we stick with each other, do for each other, and build up the world. Because misery does love company, and another soul's comfort is the only balm for the wounds."

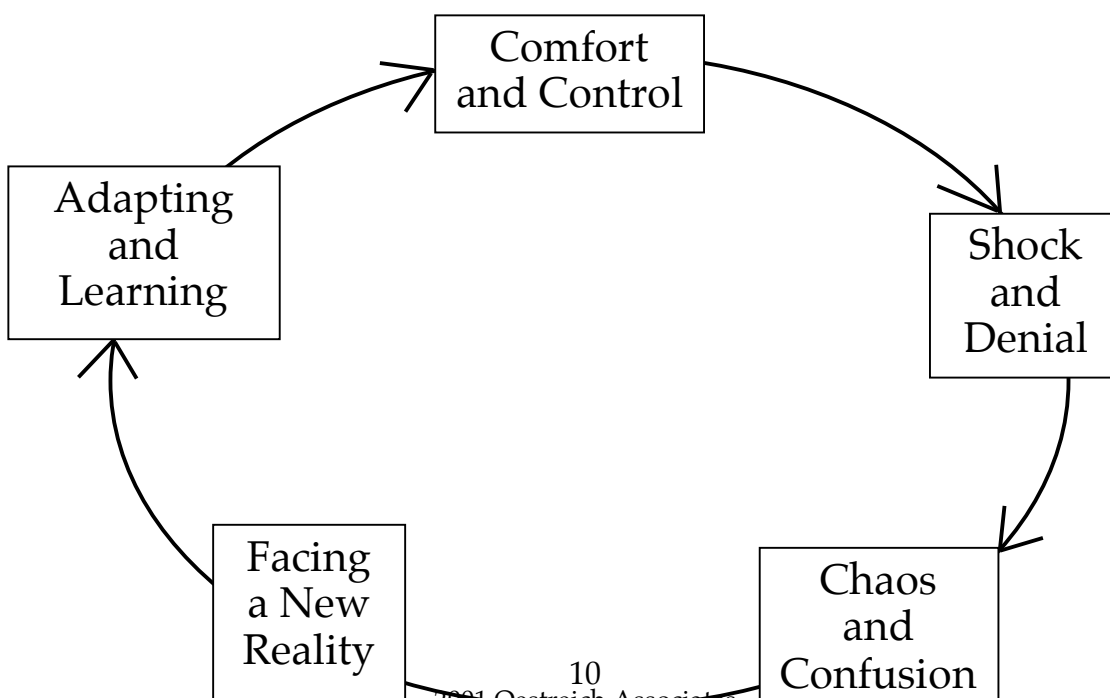
Scott Turow
Personal Injuries

A Cycle of Change Model

Many authors have built models that represent cycles of change – usually focusing on changes that are experienced as “imposed.” Something happens at work or at home, such as the down-sizing at a company, firing of a colleague, serious illness of a child – literally anything that represents significant change – and this sends people into a fairly predictable set of emotional shifts. Even when the change appears to be positive, as in a promotion or the birth of a baby, the cycle can operate. I have learned about these cycles from three primary sources:

- Maggie Moore and Paul Gergen, two West Coast consultants who years ago developed their own models. Paul’s seminar twenty years ago first opened my eyes to the ways people adjust to change.
- Marvin Weisbord, reporting Claes Janssen’s “four-room apartment model,” in his book Productive Workplaces.
- William Bridges, through his two books, Transitions, and Managing Transitions. I strongly encourage organizational leaders to read the second of these books.

Many models for change really originated in the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who noticed predictable stages in the reactions of terminally ill people to impending death. I personally prefer to think of these cycles as being about more than grieving or loss. They are really an attempt to adjust to a new reality, and since realities are impermanent and ever-changing, people are always someplace in the cycle. Here is my own view of the cycle:





I want to first explore what these stages mean, then what leaders can do to help people through them.

Comfort and Control

This is where the cycle begins and where it completes itself. Every person has a comfort and control zone that can be violated by events. When this happens, and depending on the event's severity, an individual is thrown toward Shock and Denial. Comfort and Control mean that people feel able to influence themselves and their environment to maintain a preferred sense of stability. A person feels "grounded," he or she trusts the environment and others, and is reasonably happy with the way things are.

I've heard people criticize this stage, as if it also represents complacency, and sometimes this may be the case, but the criticism is unhelpful. Everybody needs a home base from which to operate and this is it.

I've added the word "control" to the word "comfort" with no intention of suggesting that people need to control other people in order to be happy. The word control means to me, "I know how to influence my reality. I'm not helpless. I'm familiar with the territory and know what to do. I feel in control of myself and the situation."

A recent study suggests that people learn best at the edge of this zone. Not when they are thrown too far into chaos, but when they are stretched and pushed at the edge. That's an important dance to consider. If a person is pushed too far, Shock or Denial steps in and the learning gets much less predictable. Once we are too far from home the cycle really kicks into gear.

Shock and Denial

Shock and denial are like cartoon characters running off a cliff. They always run straight ahead for a few feet before they notice that they are not over solid ground. They may even turn to the audience and say “uh oh” before plummeting. Everyone else can see disaster coming, but they can’t until a moment of recognition sets in.

I once stood next to a woman who was in a car accident. She turned to me and said cheerfully, “Oh well, I just got a new car and now it’s wrecked and I get to get another one.” It sounded good, but it was really a statement of shock. Reality hadn’t begun to sink in. She was pretending that she was still in Comfort and Control. She was still running forward without noticing that she was already over the cliff.

Sometimes people run a long ways before they notice they have no ground. When the fall is too great for people to imagine and they are deeply attached to their zone of Comfort and Control, they may simply deny that anything has changed or that there is a problem. I once worked with a hospital where every month the census (how many beds were in use) kept declining, and it was declining at a faster rate each month than had been predicted. Finally, an argument broke out in the senior executive team between the “optimists,” as they called themselves, and the “doom-sayers.” It was really an argument about whether they should stay collectively in Shock and Denial or whether we should move on to the next stage, Chaos and Confusion. The argument went on so long that eventually the Board and CEO had to take the bull by the horns. By that time, however, the hospital was clearly in trouble and had to cut its staff by one third, a very painful process, with lots of spectators, such as physicians and community members asking “How could you let this happen?” Nobody on the team had really wanted to notice how far over the cliff they all were. By the time they found themselves saying “uh oh,” it was pretty late.

One thing about this stage that makes it so confusing is that it is characterized by what appears to be *reason*. It’s just that the reason no longer matches the reality. So an outsider can see the wrecked car or the wrecked financial plan, but the insiders are still holding on to their old reality, as if they could

control their environment *the way they used to*. This is tough because this clinging onto what no longer exists may be totally invisible to the people who are doing the clinging.

Chaos and Confusion

As people come out of Shock and Denial, they begin to actually feel and experience their situation. The change now quickly invades interior, subjective space. When you cut your hand you may not notice it in the first moments, but quickly enough the pain sinks in. That's what is happening. The change event is no longer "out there;" it is now inside people. What's tricky is that as this happens thinking can become driven by emotion and belief. Pushed out of their zone of Comfort and Control, people no longer have an easy place to stand. They engage in an emotional scramble to find something to hold them up. It's a volatile, changeable time. People can be highly charged and angry, or fall into passivity, feeling scattered and depressed. They may be fearful and anxious, freeze up, feel confused and "ungrounded." In this volatile time, they can easily begin to congregate around their mistrusts and fears, blaming others liberally. "Why wasn't there a sign at the edge of the cliff?" they may ask. "You're the leaders, you didn't tell us! You didn't prevent us from going over the edge! You weren't doing your jobs!" The blame and mistrust displays people in their most defensive, conflict-oriented, self-protective modes, with *polarization* of opinions and side-taking common. For some, the experience may be like being inside a washing machine. All the hidden dirt (hidden feelings) that have been in our clothes for awhile comes out in a mixed up, detergent action. It's dark, it's right in our face, it's turbulent, it's jerking us around and drowning us, and there doesn't seem to be a way out. We don't know what to do, but have to do something.

Gergen and Moore called this stage "defensive retreat." The retreat is based on a wish to go back to the way things were. In effect, people are *emotionally* struggling to get back up the cliff to the past while they *know* they can't do it. It's often at this stage that ultimatums come out and people draw lines in the sand. And it is *sand*. It blows, it shifts, and there's constant digging out – and people can be mad as hell that they are

where they are. They are *fighting* to hang on, to keep clinging, though the shift toward something new cannot be escaped.

It can be a very uncomfortable time, but also essential. A form of destruction has happened. This ambiguity, this emptiness, is what people are anxious about and are running away from. The chasm must be crossed, though how big the leap will be is unclear and what solid ground will look like on the other side is unknown. For a moment at least, people must experience this void.

Facing a New Reality

Touching the void can be a very painful moment, or series of moments. “I really have been demoted.” “My husband really is leaving me.” “We really are going out of business.” “The house really did burn down.” The loss of the old is clear and compelling, opening a way for the renovation work that needs to go on. Sometimes the feelings that go with Facing a New Reality are awful. If we’ve hurt others in Chaos and Confusion, there may be shame, guilt, or embarrassment. There may be self-criticism: “Why didn’t I see this coming? Where have I been blind?” These strong feelings can kick folks back into Chaos and Confusion so that the movement between these two stages may itself be confusing. We escape one part of emotional thinking only to find we are moving back into another. As a consequence, this movement to the new reality can be fragile. At the beginning, the difference is only that there is something to count on: a fact. A difficult one. Whatever change has occurred, that change has now been determined to be real. At this point the fighting is really over and it is evident that change is going to be the winner. Sometimes a feeling of depression and sadness or resignation seeps in, sometimes a bittersweet nostalgia for a more innocent, easy, or beautiful past that is being left behind. Sometimes just more anxiety comes in and we find ourselves carrying a big bucket of nervous energy.

What is important at this stage is that something very real has finally, really, been let go of in favor of the future. On the trapeze swing, one bar has been dropped and we have turned the intended somersault in thin air. We haven’t caught a new

bar yet, however. We may not even be hopeful of finding one. It is still dark out there, but at least we are able to let go. In this darkness, there's a moment of saying good-bye, an "ending" to use Bill Bridges' terminology, a process culminating in acceptance.

A friend of mine, speaking of his divorce, talked about this stage as one of being "stripped down to what was really important in life." It was a powerful experience that turned his life upside down and inside out, including how he thought about his leadership as CEO of a small company. He became more open, not so "heroic" in his need to have all the answers. That's a good description of what facing reality does. It strips people down to their core values, real self, most genuine sense of personal *integrity* – an integrity that is not so much moral as deeply spiritual, and that can't very well be compartmentalized in only one aspect of a life. Facing a New Reality tears away illusions and self-deceptions, perhaps enabling tough decisions that have been put off, such as leaving a job or relationship. It isn't an easy place to be – losing illusions is near the top of the list for pain – and it comes from sitting right on top of that pain and staying there. When people face reality, they become conscious and aware – self-aware – claiming a new way to be true to their own hearts. Though there may be major losses involved, they may become aware that *something* did that somersault, and it is this something that is discovered and experienced as an unchangeable essence in the midst of the change. Without that, true acceptance would never be possible.

Learning and Adapting

With acceptance, new ground can begin to come into sight. If there was resignation or remorse, this begins to be removed through *self*-comforting and a sense of more equanimity. The washing process is over. People are better able to take care of themselves as individuals. They no longer need many others to share their awful burdens or their angers and mistrusts. Telling their stories has a different motivation. In the Chaos and Confusion stage people shared in order to consolidate their emotional energy, even if it meant polarizing against others. In Learning and Adapting, people tell their stories to recognize, understand, and celebrate their own

individual journeys. Less dependent, more genuinely trusting relationships can be re-established because people are better able to stand on their own two feet.

As possibilities begin to open, a sense of personal or group renewal can emerge, culminating in learning about a new way of being. I would emphasize this is not intellectual learning. It is emotional learning – what researcher Daniel Goleman would call *emotional intelligence* -- and its signal aspect is a higher level of self-awareness. There is *no way* through the cycle without this awareness of personal experience, of one's own vulnerabilities and strengths. If the self-consciousness that comes from real destabilization and facing of new realities does not come, then a genuine change of has not yet occurred. What has happened instead is that the change process was *aborted*. Aborted change processes return people to past realities, with even stronger, higher walls around their zone of Comfort and Control, even more Shock and Denial, and bigger emotions next time they are truly thrown into Chaos and Confusion.

Some years ago, a consultant friend noticed this entire change cycle in companies where quality improvement efforts were ongoing. First, the leaders of a company would say they were “already doing quality” or minimize the problems – a good indicator of Shock and Denial. Then, as efforts got underway, the leaders would fight back, often through undermining, inconsistent, mistrustful, cynical, and passive aggressive behavior – strong evidence of Chaos and Confusion. Then, eventually, when it was apparent the effort wasn't going away, they would face the new realities of changed approaches and philosophies and how much work they would actually need to do to make quality real in their organization. Some preferred to leave, also a sign of facing reality. For those who stayed this was the point where they would begin to personally internalize the process and start learning, and that learning in turn released a new way a life for the organization.

As Learning and Adapting continue, the way is paved for a new arena of Comfort and Control. This can feel like achieving a new identity as a person, a team, or an organization. The stories that are told, whether about creating quality in an organization surviving the loss of a close friend, or choosing a new career, all celebrate *universal* qualities of what it

means to be human. They mirror what Joseph Campbell, the noted writer and teacher of mythology, called the hero's journey.

Lessons

There are things we can do as leaders to help people through the stages. But before describing them, let me share a few of the lessons I've learned from reading about other's models of change and exploring my own.

- A leader goes through her or his own change cycles and does not just watch from the sidelines. Leaders may go through them faster or slower than other people, but often because they know more about a change or have experienced many changes during their career, they are ahead of where others might be.
- You can't necessarily hurry anyone up or control them going through the stages. People go through them as a journey and the boat only travels so fast.
- Each stage has its value and importance. None can really be side-stepped, though their duration and intensity vary a lot based on individual temperament, circumstances, and the nature of the change.
- It's not a linear process; it's an organic one. People go back and forth, mix up stages, do pieces and come back again a month or even years later.
- Unresolved feelings about past changes are triggered each time a new change appears. Unless there's an opportunity to go back and grieve this past, people can become emotionally centered on the Chaos and Confusion stage.
- Many change often happen simultaneously, but too many severe changes can leave people in a state of more or less permanent denial and/or chaos.

What a leader can do

It is a good question what a leader's role really is in helping people through the change process. I've met a lot of leaders who do want to know how to make some change happen, but they primarily want to know so that a

program or reorganization or layoff can be implemented as quickly as possible. They want people get over their emotions rapidly so that productivity stays high, and they 'get on with it,' whatever 'it' is. Occasionally, a leader may even try to use information about the cycle in a manipulative way – "If I do x, then they'll do y and I'll get what I want." Such tactics are transparent. They damage others, and ultimately they damage the leader and his/her agenda, as well.

What gets missed by these leaders is the importance of simply and sincerely "holding the cycle" for people as they go through it, being patient with it and seeing it as a natural thing. Bridges does a fabulous job of showing how the emotional *transitions* that people go through are separate from whatever *changes* are being made in an organization or whatever other life changes people have experienced.

The key point is that leaders need to accept in a genuine way the raw humanity of the cycle, and that means they need to be deeply in touch with their own trips through the cycle. That's an essential part of helping others with change, and something I see many leaders resisting in one way or another. They want to stay in their own Comfort and Control zone, too. As a consequence, they don't face the critical truth that other people will respond very differently – have different energies, make different choices, have different priorities, carry different ways of processing information, possess different temperaments and backgrounds, gravitate to different values – the list goes on and on. It is this failure on a leader's part, this reluctance to accept the deep and real diversity of the human community without judgment, that blocks the leader every time. I believe the reason people do this is simple; to accept this diversity means throwing out a lot of Comfort and Control in favor of ambiguity and a slower pace. It means not knowing what to do; not having a reliable *formula*. But, of course, the need for a formula is just another attempt to stay in Comfort and Control. On the contrary, accepting diversity forces a more vulnerable connection with others,

a sense of genuine inter-dependency and human flux that stands outside any formula.

The reluctance to accept diversity has many faces. One of the most common is a leader getting worried about how many people are stuck in Denial or Chaos and Confusion. The worry often reflects the leader's own denials, mistrusts, projections, and perhaps a lack of acceptance and kindness toward him- or herself. When this happens, the appropriate move for the leader is back toward his or her own cycle and where he or she is personally stuck, not where others are stuck.

Being With People

Being with people requires a sense of what stage you, the leader are in – so that you don't just project this onto others – and a sense of where others' really are at. For instance, if you are in Learning and Adapting trying to help someone who is in Chaos and Confusion, you may not be able to use your experience to be of any real assistance. You must use tools appropriate to the stage. This includes the notion that because different people are in different places at the same moment, you will need to be versatile when using these tools. Here are some suggestions:

Shock and Denial

- **Provide lots of factual information** – many times and in many different ways in order to help others know what's going on. This is the most important thing to do because it highlights the gap between where we actually are right now and the past. Let people see, hear for themselves what's happening, and especially the meaning and consequences of the gap.
- **Be patient.** Movement happens in its own time.
- **Avoid intellectual debate** – it's not founded on an agreed upon reality.
- **Don't add more shock** by being coercive or shaming or otherwise becoming overly emotional. ("What's the

matter with you people, you're all in denial!") This actually encourages Shock and Denial to linger.

- **Recognize true emergencies.** If the house is on fire and people don't see it, don't let this stop needed decisions.

Chaos and Confusion

- **Stay in a compassionate place,** honestly reporting what's changing and what is not changing.
- **Expect people to be emotional** and negative (depressed or angry), but perhaps also try to cover this up. Expect that feelings will leak, among them divisiveness and a search for the guilty, including a need to hold you, the leader, accountable. Expect informal leaders to spring up around whom people rally and mistrust can consolidate. Expect people to want and need something or someone to blame, and that the clearer this enemy is, the more the negative energy will unify around fighting this common threat.
- **Expect old, unresolved cycles to come up** – what happened ten years ago, for example, can feel as real as if it happened yesterday.
- **Help others get their raw emotions, beliefs, "undiscussable issues" and perceptions out into the open** in a supportive environment, especially issues that reflect negative assumptions about others or you.
- **Answer any mistrusts and blaming directly and firmly,** holding a centered place and setting clear boundaries for acceptable behavior. Your job is to cleanly separate what's true from what's not true and to hold tension around the demands of the time and the fact that things are different. If you've personally made mistakes, acknowledge these for what they are and apologize without false or excessive self-deprecation.
- **Openly encourage collaboration,** sharing perspectives, and respecting differing voices and dissent. Encourage people to think for themselves as individuals, to take the risk to speak up, sharing new ideas rather than getting trapped in side-taking.

- **Avoid shaming/provide support.** Give support that “legitimizes” feelings and mistrusts without giving them credence. (“It’s natural anyone in this situation would feel disheartened and worried, but what you are saying about the motivations behind the change simply are not true. What is true is that....”)
- **Stay with it**, clearing out your own negative assumptions, if you need to, with a trusted colleague.

Facing a New Reality

- You won’t need to say much, but your warmth, your presence, your willingness to **stay visibly connected** will be vital. Listen to people’s stories of what has happened to them. Acknowledge how difficult change can be. Praise the person’s new insights, their strength, the self-awareness that is emerging. If appropriate, graciously offer and/or accept apologies for behavior that reflects the mistrusts of Chaos and Confusion.
- **Be sensitive to the fragility of the moment.** Being with someone as they come into a new reality can be an especially close, personal, and vulnerable time, one that can easily slip backwards into confusion and high emotion. So again, stay with it, helping others to feel good about the progress by confirming their capabilities and supporting their new grasp of things.
- As the ground becomes more solid, people facing a new reality begin to think more constructively about the future. You can help by **answering questions from your own experience and helping others make plans**, even a few starting action steps that represent knowing *how* to go forward.

Learning and Adaptation

- This is an especially good point to **bring people together to share their experiences** in an environment of mutual learning. If people have had to go through the changes and are facing of a new reality together, this would be an excellent time to build a sense of community around this common journey. Let people

tell their stories and hear the stories of others, creating a common bond while deeply respecting the different views, approaches, and experiences of individuals.

- **Help individuals and groups put *their* immediate plans in motion and stay open to learning.** Assist people to apply new energy to the plans they (not you) own for change and help them stay “unstuck.” In particular, help folks accept any mistakes without recriminations and keep trying, focusing on the lessons, not the fact things didn’t go as well as they hoped.
- **Help people firm up *their* vision** of the future and begin to think strategically about what is most important to accomplish over the long haul. At this point people are ready for detail about how to make this happen and to engage in motivated action.
- **Bring in some lightness and humor.** Earlier stages can be quite serious. At this point, many are ready to laugh at themselves and at situations. Model self-deprecating humor, not humor that targets or teases others in ways that might be misinterpreted.

Authenticity and Courage

*“It doesn’t interest
me who you know or how
you came to be here.*

*I want to know if
you will stand in the
center of the fire with me
and not shrink back.”*

Oriah Mountain Dreamer
“The Invitation”

The Nature of Authenticity

When people are thrown into the fires of change, leaders are expected to have some wisdom, something to share with others that will help them cope, understand their situation, and trust themselves. They want humanness, realness, connection with their leaders. These are qualities that might be consolidated into the term *authenticity*.

Some years ago I worked with an executive at a telecommunications company. He was a model of intuitively understanding the effects of change on people. I watched him as his career expanded through several promotions and physical moves. At first, when he introduced himself to a team as their new leader, he would ask questions in a somewhat dispassionate way, trying to learn as much as possible about the situation so that he would know what to do. It was clear that was holding on to his zone of Comfort and Control. Often this was accompanied by an unproductive tension in the new group. People were performing for him. They wanted to look good and were also trying to hold onto their own zones of Comfort and Control.

But as time went by, my client began to reject this approach. Instead, he started expressing more of himself and he began to show others a real willingness to go out of his own zone in a way that

showed his own vulnerabilities and humanity. With a new team he learned to tell his personal and career story, not just the resume version, but the real story, including mistakes he had made along the way, set-backs, tough emotions he had felt, and moments of big learning. His approach was warm, personal, completely non-defensive and non-manipulative. He was risking being himself by showing deep respect for the cycles of change that he and others go through -- and were going through at that instant. He showed others his vulnerable side, when and how he had touched the void. In a way, he was showing others how they might touch the void together. He was being authentic as a leader.

Using this approach, he brought people together easily and quickly. Within a couple of hours, he could stimulate a trusting dialogue about the real issues and problems that needed to be addressed, including ones where people in the room admitted some personal failures. He was that good at building trust. It was always a pleasure to watch because he made it look easy.

Authenticity is accurately knowing and being deeply true to yourself. It means being in touch with all of your feelings, capabilities, boundaries, gifts and shadow sides, your whole self, and choosing to communicate that self to another person. Sometimes that may mean there is interpersonal risk or vulnerability, but at its core authenticity is really only a state of intimacy – first with yourself and then, as it is appropriate to the moment, with others. It is a state of openness to your own soft spots of fear and potential hurt that are still alive, along with the deep strength that comes from affirming life as a journey. Authenticity is closely connected to one’s own sense of personal intuition and judgment – one’s own innate wisdom. This wisdom was aptly described in the thirteenth century by the Persian poet, Rumi.

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence

in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

The second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

--from The Essential Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

To live completely from this fountainhead of personal wisdom would be to live a life of authenticity. Most of us, however, find that we are more or less in a state of constantly correcting the course – as a sailboat that is influenced by the currents and winds must constantly adapt to maintain its heading. So authenticity often feels more like a *moment* of connection within oneself or with others, when a true self rises in the instant to consciousness.

When a leader models the vulnerable side of authenticity in his or her work and relationships, it legitimizes not only the leader's distinctive life path and personality, but also the life path and personality of others who are open to the leader's guidance. The leader doesn't have to offer direction or a solution so much as serve as a point of honest understanding, a reference point in the life and work of others. He or she becomes a non-directive mentor, a listening post, a witness whose personal authenticity provides a safe haven in which others can try out their own wisdom and get honest feedback. In relationships of this kind, both the leader and others feel "seen" and deeply respected and valued for who they are as individuals. All parties feel their uniqueness and their special value without false praise.

I believe this is exactly the kind of relationship that Peter Koestenbaum, the noted leadership thinker and writer, was referring to in a recent interview for *Fast Company* magazine. He commented that we don't give ourselves the time needed for "the kind of

character-building conversations” that will result in meaningful change for ourselves or for our organizations. He says we keep trying to make things work by applying more and more *competence* to our projects, when in fact the problems we face demand a whole new way of thinking, acting, relating to others – in essence, an emphasis on authenticity rather than more technical or intellectual expertise.

For example, sometimes a leader must convey “hard news” – constructive but negative feedback, a tough decision, or a communication, such as a firing or downsizing, that by its nature is frightening and incomplete. A leader’s authenticity, not technical/intellectual skills, is what can help make this news more “hearable.” When there is no question of the leader’s genuine care, sincerity, and honesty – and deep respect for the unique path of others – defensiveness usually loses some of its grip on the situation. The leader’s authenticity is no guarantee the change will be accepted and it is not a trick to influence others or make someone else accept hard news. In a sense, authenticity is never an attempt to do anything other than personally *be real*. If that is of help to another, that’s wonderful, but authenticity is free of having to produce a certain outcome or result. If it is aimed to produce a certain result, it is not, by definition, authenticity. The point is that the leader’s sincere presence and openness facilitate movement through Chaos and Confusion toward acceptance of new realities. Behavior that is distant, closed, judgmental, self-contained or otherwise “tape-recorded,” will just exacerbate the level of chaos and groundlessness already there.

Many things can impede a leader’s authenticity. These include:

- the need to look smart, always have an answer, be right, wise or smarter than others, including the need to categorize or reduce others
- the need to be invulnerable
- the need to create others’ lives in the mold of one’s own
- the need to care-take and protect others as a form of personal protection or control
- the need to see others as similar to oneself in emotional reactions and experiences
- the need to project one’s own dilemmas and feelings (particularly hidden angers, conflicts, or shame) onto others
- the need to be seen as perfect or “having it all together”

- lack of awareness of one's own family, ethnic, religious, and cultural programming
- many other needs too numerous to name

These aspects of personality represent a shadow that can be difficult to escape. This *edge* to our preferred sense of self is attached to a deeper part of who we really are, no matter how much we pretend otherwise or criticize the same faults in others. To the extent that we can be aware in the moment of our own shadow's appearance that we are sliding away from authenticity, the easier it is to come back to true leadership and to help people work through the edges they, too, are facing.

Easier said than done. The tendency to *slide* happens very quickly, automatically, and often unconsciously. The dark energy appears and we find ourselves either defending, walling out, becoming aggressive – the problem has suddenly become out there with someone else – or else we become self-critical, tense, and self-doubting. The slide reflects how deeply ingrained our own patterns of reaction are. It displays our innate rigidity and fragility of character and how we are still, at times, prone to a destabilization of emotions and thinking. The slide shows us that we can never know enough about ourselves; that we have no *absolute* immunity from the emotional thinking characteristic of Chaos and Confusion.

If there is redemption in this it is in understanding that the process of destabilization and recovery is also part of the road to greater authenticity, maybe even a necessary part. Coming to grips with the slide time after time, accepting and affirming this self-work, is an important path to growth – as both a leader and as a person.

“There is a story about a group of people climbing to the top of a mountain. It turns out it’s pretty steep, and as soon as they get up to a certain height, a couple of people look down and see how far it is, and they completely freeze; they had come up against their edge and they couldn’t go beyond it. The fear was so great that they couldn’t move. Other people tripped on ahead, laughing and talking, but as the climb got steeper and more scary, more people began to get scared and freeze. All the way up this mountain there were places where people met their edge and just froze and couldn’t go any farther. The people who made it to the top looked out and were very happy to have made it to the top. The moral of the story is that it really doesn’t make any difference where you meet your edge; just meeting it is the point. Life is a whole journey of meeting your edge again and again. That’s where you are challenged; that’s where, if you’re a person who wants to live, you start to ask yourself questions like, “Now, why am I so scared? What is it that I don’t want to see? Why can’t I go any further than this?” The people who got to the top were not the heroes of the day. It’s just that they weren’t afraid of heights; they are going to meet their edge somewhere else. The ones who froze at the bottom were not the losers. They simply stopped first and so their lesson came earlier than the others. However, sooner or later everybody meets his or her edge.”

**Pema Chödrön,
The Wisdom of No Escape**

Management Questions, Leadership Questions

Learning to lead with authenticity and in ways that best facilitate growth is not easy. It is a struggle to understand how to *intentionally* improve. Some believe that leadership cannot be taught. What is right about that idea is that there is not much about leadership than can be taught *intellectually*. Leadership learning is mostly heart-directed, not head-directed and it is tested by experience in community with others. This kind of learning is a reflection of deep personal commitments and choices, not just attendance at workshops or the reading of books. It comes from the laboratory of life in which we watch others and absorb their behavior, search our souls for the right decisions, and reflect on our own gifts and shadows.

Leadership learning comes from intentionally approaching our edge. It is a place of personal softness, darkness, vulnerability, and shakiness – the very opposite of the stereotypical behavior of “the strong leader.” In other words, it comes from a seed of authenticity that is already planted inside us. To act on that seed always risks sending us beyond the current range of Comfort and Control and therefore requires courage. We become brave by going again and again to that soft place in ways that stimulate unique, personal learning. Those who are unable to do this may learn some techniques – mostly management techniques – but don’t carry the soul of leadership.

In leadership learning, you are simultaneously your own best expert and worst enemy, and every experience is potentially a powerful mirror. You yourself have to “put it out there” as a leader and then see what happens. Learning is that experience and its outcomes, positive or negative. It is, in some sense, always an experiment.

The good news is that we can consciously facilitate and awaken learning – even if the outcomes are not always predictable. Leadership isn’t something that you’ve got or not got in some mysteriously innate way. It is unlocked through the awareness that comes from penetrating self-inquiry. In fact, the very question, “Have I got it?” if held onto long enough and consciously enough, can itself awaken new thinking, new potentials, and new capabilities.

A beginning point is to think about improvement in general and then separate out the directions and questions most linked to leadership. Most of us with some thought can identify areas where we feel we could and should be more effective. We may be aware of skills that we need as the result of self-observations or feedback from others – or a combination of the two. Some of these areas may be more *managerial* in nature. This is true no matter what our job title is or whether it is a corporation or a family we are trying to lead. Consider

- How do I use the resources available to me as effectively as possible?
- How do I know whether I am doing a good job in others' eyes?
- How do I better manage my time?
- What classes or seminars do I need to take to improve my technical skills?
- How can we get better organized to get all this stuff done?
- What do I do to create more effective teamwork?

Other questions are much more internal, subjective, and personal and deal more with leadership than management. Some of these questions might be:

- What is my own genuine vision?
- How do I take greater risks to support what I am deeply committed to?
- What are my unique gifts and how do I build on them?
- How do I increase my awareness of my own and others' inner thoughts and feelings?
- How can I more frequently tell *my* truth?
- How do I stop trying to control and start leading?
- How do *I* change?

While there may be overlap, one could say that management questions tend to focus on issues that are more external, skill-based, and organizational. Intellectual learning and practice usually suffices. By comparison, leadership questions relate to the cross-over point between a person's true self and the role he or she is playing. Learning more management skills may enhance the zone of Comfort and Control. The learning reduces tension and ambiguity, provides structure, provides methods. Leadership questions, by comparison,

constantly push against the edge of the Comfort and Control zone. They are a form of intentional discomfort. They represent holding the tension in an individual, intuitive way so that when the answers come, they come as a form of personal wisdom.

It's not that one type of learning is more valuable than another. Development on the management side is critical, too. But all the management learning in the world will not add up to creating leadership. The point is that leadership has its own domain that is reflected in the kind of questions we ask ourselves.

Getting clear about these questions begins to drive cycles of change in a more conscious way. A good leadership question might take a very long time to answer. Maybe a whole lifetime wouldn't be enough to finish. A question of this kind represents an opportunity to face oneself at the deepest level possible. This may be emotional and psychological, or it may be existential or spiritual.

What are your own management questions?

What are your own leadership questions?

The biggest barrier to asking and answering such questions is fear of the journey, which is essentially fear of the cycle of change and the moments when the void is touched. This is often a fear of discovering who we are or simply of the impermanence of who we are. No one says it better than Pema Chödrön, the writer and American Buddhist nun. "Fear," she says, "is a natural reaction to getting closer to the truth."

Yet at their best, these questions are compelling precisely because they lead to an eminently practical outcome: they enable deep, positive personal change. They open up understandings and freedoms not previously accessible. They change communities and companies, families and teams; they change the world *through the lives* of the leaders themselves.

A client struggled with his decision whether or not to leave a relatively comfortable job as president of a company owned by someone else. Did he really need to own his own enterprise? Why? What did this have to do with him, his personal destiny, with his

desire to lead? Later, after he made the decision to purchase his own firm with a colleague, he looked back on the experience and recounted the process of change:

“Who knows where it started? A tiny moment, a glance? So, too, it was for me. I think of all the ideas and faith I was exposed to as I let myself open up. I was generally exposed to ideas, feelings, and thoughts by people who saw some things that I didn’t – and who cared about me....There is some initial spark in time that may be very tiny that starts the learning process. During the learning there are some very tough moments as layers get questioned and peeled as bigger questions get revealed. And there is support and love. Then the outline of some choice becomes clearer...a choice that is about falling or letting the journey live itself out and not being trapped by what others planned – living your free will. And then you fall. And then you begin to really experience what you couldn’t fully describe on the other side. And now you are living, but you have a partner you will never abandon – your free will.”

Almost by definition, a leader is someone who consciously *chooses* the cycle of change. Who searches it out in the depths of his or her own being. And that is a critical difference from those who want impersonal or easy influence, the authoritarian managers of the day (or their indecisive counterparts) who want *others* to change first. The search to find a personal cycle of change through a good question is not an external hunt to bolster Comfort and Control, but an internal hunt for growth and meaning. It cannot be reduced to simple steps. There is no teacher who can tell you exactly how to learn about yourself.

Community

“Truth has no path, and that is the beauty of truth, it is living. A dead thing has a path to it because it is static, but when you see that the truth is something living, moving, which has no resting place...then you will also see that this living thing is what you actually are....”

J. Krishnamurti
Freedom from the Known

Down and In

We have to count on ourselves for this journey that begins with a question. We own these journeys personally and privately. We can't give them over to others or simply ignore the need for them lest we activate the worst side of Denial. And yet, even if we have the courage to keep asking our leadership questions, there are no guarantees that the answers we get *alone* will be very accurate. Coming out of Denial, we are all too prone, in the midst of Chaos and Confusion, to trust the erroneous answers provided by our own shadows. Sometimes it seems like the only inevitable thing about this journey is that we will have to face down our own ignorance of ourselves. Even worse, this often happens in the mirror of our relationships with those who are most important to us.

There is a mystery here to explore in the inter-dependency of the leader's interior journey and the quality of his or her relationships with others. The journey first and foremost is one that is “down and in,” to use the words of Parker Palmer paraphrasing writer Annie Dillard, one where we meet our inner monsters. But it touches what is universal in our relationships with one another. Palmer, a teacher and activist, summarizes:

“...if we ride those monsters all the way down, we find the most precious thing of all: the unified field, our complex and inexplicable caring for one another, the community we have underneath our brokenness, our life together...Great leadership comes from people who have made the downward journey through violence and terror, who have touched the deep place where we are in community with each other, and who can help take other people to that place. That is what great leadership is all about.”

He is saying that the community itself depends on the inner journeys of its leaders, their capacity to reflect, and deal with their own shadows. And this seems to coincide perfectly with William Stafford’s sensibility, expressed in the poem on the cover page introducing this booklet. That sensibility is not only knowing who we are but also being able to share this and talk about it with each other so that we find a common vision, a “star” that is really ours.

“If you don’t know the kind of person I am...”

Another connection with Palmer’s statement can be found in the writings of J. Krishnamurti, the Indian thinker and teacher. Krishnamurti’s own history is an emblem for this learning that our world is only a reflection of ourselves; that we are the truth -- if we can face it. Born in 1895 and “discovered” fourteen years later on a beach in India by a seer of the Theosophical Society, he was educated to become the next “world teacher.” However, the more Krishnamurti attended to his own spiritual development, the less inclined he was to try to fulfill this plan created by other people. At 34, he declared that “truth is a pathless land,” disbanded his followers (already world-wide and in the thousands), divorcing himself from those who sought to make him something other than what he felt himself to be. He continued to teach into old age, but not as an “authority.” His message continued to reflect the ancient wisdom that only by dealing with ourselves can the world change.

“We are each of us responsible for every war because of the aggressiveness of our own lives, because of our nationalism, our selfishness, our gods, our prejudices, our ideals, all of which divide us. And only when we realise, not intellectually but actually, as actually as we would recognise that we are hungry or in pain, that you and I are responsible for all this existing chaos, for all the misery

throughout the entire world because we have contributed to it in our daily lives...only then will we act."

The same message, less globally expressed, is shared by Robert Quinn, in his recent book, Deep Change; this time in the more immediate context of contemporary organizational leadership:

"There is an important link between deep change at the personal level and deep change at the organizational level. To make deep personal change is to develop a new paradigm, a new self, one that is more effectively aligned with today's realities. This can occur only if we are willing to journey into unknown territory and confront the wicked problems we encounter. This journey does not follow the assumptions of rational planning. The objective may not be clear, and the path is not paved with familiar procedures. This tortuous journey requires that we leave our comfort zone and step outside our normal roles. In doing so, we learn the paradoxical lesson that we can change the world only by changing ourselves. This is not just a cute abstraction; it is an elusive key to effective performance in all aspects of life."

All of this is not to say we ought to torture ourselves through introspection. If going "down and in" means facing a new reality, then there needs to be a lot of attention to acceptance and self-care, humor and kindness. The seriousness of the work need not become grim or self-destructive, and in fact learning is enhanced when the lessons can be absorbed with lightness, even though the tasks are large.

Large indeed. This is an awesome and mysterious undertaking – to think in terms of deep self-inquiry and to search out as Parker suggests the "community we have underneath our brokenness, our life together." We -- you and I -- are so prone to Shock and Denial and to Chaos and Confusion, that to choose a cycle of change, to actually choose to move beyond the zones of our personal Comfort and Control, is a radical, provocative choice. Those still in shock, like the executive team at the hospital, will want to argue about whether this is really necessary. Those in Confusion and Chaos, will want to know who is to blame for our situation and wonder how soon they can expect it all to be over with (because somebody else is responsible for fixing it).

For myself, searching for that community has gone through stage after stage as I've learned more about leadership. I think I really got started on this search when I was in college.

In 1970, I was an undergraduate at Yale University during the stormy time immediately following the Kent State student protests and killings. In the days following, there was much Chaos and Confusion across the country. This was especially true at Yale because for some reason the trials of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton of the Black Panthers had been moved to New Haven, Connecticut, where Yale is located. I was beginning to learn about leadership that spring watching the school's administrators grapple with a volatile situation rapidly heating beyond the boiling point. Rumors of dynamite being brought into town were part of the news on the streets as shopkeepers boarded up their windows anticipating riots. The National Guard, bayonets attached to their rifles, threw pepper spray around trying to get crowds of students and other young people who had come to New Haven to disperse. One night, the scene on Old Campus was surreal. Above the shouting crowds of protestors being herded by the Guard and amid the wafting clouds of pepper spray laced with marijuana smoke, there sat Allen Ginsburg, the poet, on a high stage serenely reciting his endless verses.

As much as I learned from all that excitement, I learned even more from my friends. One of these was my friend, Peter Toumanoff, a descendent of Russian nobility with a fine appreciation for both Tolstoy and modern economics. He brought me one of the key lessons of my time at Yale, a simple line, in response to something observed at a student meeting. It was on one of those days of suspended classes and rabble-rousing rhetoric. He turned to me and said, "You see all this? You see all of us, we're supposed to be the 'best and brightest' right? Future lawyers, doctors, politicians. You see what's actually going on here? People are taking sides because they don't want to piss off their friends or parents. They're already stuck. They think they are really smart and have their act together, but they are pretty much still sheep. We haven't actually figured out yet how to think for ourselves."

That was it: "think for ourselves." Wow. We were in Chaos and Confusion, some of us still in Shock and Denial. And in Chaos what *don't* we do? We don't think for ourselves. We are swayed, influenced. We don't lead; we are led, mostly by our own

unexamined *interior* conditioning, our own mistrusts of others unlike ourselves, our own need for familiar kinds of Comfort and Control.

Everybody at the meeting seemed to be wishing for leadership that would bring people together, not noticing the possibilities for their own. It was a powerful lesson in speaking up, the value of dissent and holding tension, the role of authenticity, and maybe even collaboration. But the trick, of course, was that to have achieved a measure of authenticity, we would have had to go down and in, and none of us knew much about how to do that yet. We would have needed to allow the experience to open us to core personal values and the rawer truth that we really didn't know what we believed in at all. Most of us were too immature for that and we were all still in a very protected environment. We weren't really in life yet, though some like Peter could already see with the eyes of experience.

The school year closed later than month and we all went home with a note saying that there'd be no grades that semester because there had been too much chaos on campus. Another friend, George Gaskins from North Carolina, decided to leave Yale for good. He'd seen enough. He was going to South America to teach school with kids who didn't have the tiniest fraction of the wealth and privilege represented by the student body, let alone their parents. As with Peter's observations, I won't forget my last conversation with George, just as he left. He was a lot more succinct than Peter had been. "It's about integrity," he said, shaking his head in disgust and walking off.

"In the face of all this global chaos, the only hope is self transformation. Unless we as individuals find new ways of understanding between people, ways that can touch and transform the heart and soul deeply, both indigenous cultures and those in the West will continue to fade away, dismayed that all the wonders of technology, all of the many philosophical "isms," and all the planning of the global corporations will be helpless to reverse the trend."

Malidoma Some'
Of Water and the Spirit

"The condition of alienation, of being asleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind, is the condition of the normal man.

Society highly values the normal man. It educates children to lose themselves to become absurd, and thus normal.

Normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years.

Our behavior is a function of our experience. We act according to the way we see things.

If our experience is destroyed, our behavior will be destructive.

If our experience is destroyed, we have lost our own selves."

R.D. Laing
The Politics of Experience

My Leadership Question

If you are still with me at this point, you are going to hear one of my questions. I've had a lot of them lately. Maybe this one is one of yours, too. Here it is:

What is a community anyway?

I've been a leadership consultant and culture change agent for many years now. At the moment this is an especially compelling question, I'll admit it, because of world events, but I've been holding it for some time – probably years. I'm asking now more consciously, I guess, because I've been watching with fascination as people have come together in this country since September 11th. That's only ten days ago as I write this. As I watch, a couple of side questions, part of the depression of the time, come to the surface in me:

Does a community exist only when tragedy strikes? Does a community exist only when there's an enemy?

I look at these questions, study them, and see their underlying cynicism. I reject them, knowing they are part of my own Chaos and Confusion, and go back to the first question, which seems to be more about having a personal vision.

Recently, I've received two overlapping answers to my questions about leadership and community. One is from a book I read recently, On the Rez, by Ian Frazier. The other is from a personal experience.

On the Rez is a fascinating, heart rending, and affirming exploration of everyday life for Oglala Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Frazier was in search of what it is that gives Native Americans a reputation for “self-possession” – essentially their courage and confidence. Along the way, he found a modern day heroine in a young woman named SuAnne Big Crow. As part of her story, he recounts how SuAnne helped her basketball team overcome prejudice and pain at a game off the reservation in Lead, South Dakota. They are confronted with a noisy, hostile, mostly white crowd shouting anti-Indian taunts. It is SuAnne, the

youngest member of the team, who finds the personal confidence to lead the others onto the floor of the gym.

She came running onto the court dribbling the basketball, with her teammates running behind. On the court, the noise was deafeningly loud. SuAnne went right down the middle; but instead of running a full lap, she suddenly stopped when she got to center court. Her teammates were taken by surprise, and some bumped into one another. Coach Zimiga at the rear of the line did not know why they had stopped. SuAnne turned to [teammate] Doni De Cory and tossed her the ball. Then she stepped into the jump-ball circle at center court, in front of the Lead fans. She unbuttoned her warm-up jacket, took it off, draped it over her shoulders, and began to do the Lakota shawl dance. SuAnne knew all the traditional dances—she had competed in many powwows as a little girl—and the dance she chose is a young woman’s dance, graceful and modest and show-offy all at the same time....SuAnne began to sing in Lakota, swaying back and forth in the jump-ball circle, doing the shawl dance, using her warm-up jacket as a shawl. The crowd went completely silent. “All that stuff the Lead fans were yelling—it was like she reversed it somehow,” a teammate said. In the sudden quiet, all you could hear was her Lakota song. SuAnne stood up, dropped her jacket, took the ball from Doni De Cory, and ran a lap around the court dribbling expertly and fast. The fans began to cheer and applaud. She sprinted to the basket, went up in the air, and laid the ball through the hoop, with the fans cheering loudly now. Pine Ridge went on to win the game.”

Well, that’s not quite the truth, as Frazier goes on to point out. This is the legend. In fact, Pine Ridge did not win the game, but lost 66-64 in the last three seconds. That doesn’t matter, however, because this is a story about SuAnne’s impact on community. This event and others convinced many people on the reservation of SuAnne’s presence as a true leader. Some even felt she was the living reincarnation of an earlier Big Crow chief whose self-effacing nobility had also been legendary. Tragically, SuAnne was killed in a car accident not long before she turned eighteen, while driving with her mother to a South Dakota awards banquet for young women basketball players.

What I found fascinating, and on the way to a vision of leadership and community, is where Frazier takes this story. Commenting on SuAnne he writes:

America is a leap of the imagination. From its beginnings, people had only a persistent idea of what a good country should be. The idea involved freedom, equality, justice, and the pursuit of happiness; nowadays most of us probably could not describe it a lot more clearly than that. The truth is, it always has been a bit of a guess. No one has ever known for sure whether a country based on such an idea is really possible, but again and again, we have leaped toward the idea and hoped. What SuAnne Big Crow demonstrated in the Lead high school gym is that making the leap is the whole point. The idea does not truly live unless it is expressed by an act; the country does not live unless we make the leap from our tribe or focus group or gated community or demographic, and land on the shaky platform of that idea of a good country which all kinds of different people share.

I find... hopefulness, and more, in SuAnne's dance in the gym in Lead. My high school football coach used to show us films of our previous game every Monday after practice, and whenever he liked a particular play, he would run it over and over again. If I had a film of SuAnne at Lead... I would study it in slow motion frame by frame. There's a magic in what she did, along with the promise that public acts of courage are still alive out there somewhere. Mostly, I would run the film of SuAnne again and again for my own braveheart song. I refer to her...for proof that it's a public service to be brave.

Somewhere in Frazier's vision is a truth we may need right now. Imagination, a leap, public acts of courage on the way to bringing people together, not separating them further. I am personally inspired hearing Frazier's vision. I am inspired because he leaves it up to us, our authenticity, our own risky personal journeys. He encourages us to *act* on our individual beliefs of what a good country is in a way that constantly re-affirms the presence of community at the core. He encourages us to display that deep personal integrity by "thinking for ourselves." If we do this, he says, our country remains a brilliant possibility. And the principles apply to *any* community – home, team, company, town.

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?*

Mary Oliver
"The Summer Day"

Our Star

I'm still thinking about On the Rez and America being a leap of the imagination when the terrorists attack. By that Friday, September 14th, I can't handle any more news reports. I need to get out from under the stress and the questions and the huge sadness of it all, so I go to the beach. I go to my favorite one, Cannon Beach; in my estimation one of the best along the Oregon Coast. The broad Pacific Ocean beach and monolithic sea stacks have an unmatched grandeur there, and the hills behind are thickly forested, alternately filled with fog, wind, and sunlight. The place always grabs me, shakes me, and says, "Here take a look at this – the world really is still a beautiful and shining place. No matter what."

I'm there awhile before I really understand why my journey has brought to this place. In this case, the reason is a person. His name is Tony and he has pale blue-gray eyes, kind of glazed. They remind me a little of Paul Newman's, maybe Paul Newman's in "The Verdict," his movie about an alcoholic lawyer. Tony's pretty much in the bag for the evening, sitting there at the edge of the beach with his guitar. He's smoking cigarettes down to the filter and trying to keep warm in a chill breeze. He's got a yellow plastic bag for some belongings, along with the beat-up classical guitar.

Perhaps it's the can of Budweiser in his hand, but he seems reasonably cheerful for a homeless guy. After a few questions it's clear his chosen livelihood is playing his guitar on the streets, doing odd jobs, and occasionally getting work at a barbecue place inland. He talks about traveling with the seasons up and down the West Coast. He's got friends in Cannon Beach, he says, he just can't remember anymore where they live. We talked for awhile.

Maybe I'm just a patsy for this kind of homeless person. I was ready to go, but still sticking around. "You got enough money tonight?" I asked lamely, meaning perhaps to ask, has *anybody* got enough of any good thing tonight? He was tracking me perfectly. "I don't take charity," he said, "but I got another song for you."

I wish I could remember all the lyrics of that song. The whole thing was about Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali and it was a description of these two fighters from the inside out, talking to one another and to the world.

*My name is Muhammad Ali
I float like a butterfly
I sting like a bee
I got no reason to lie.*

When he was done, he turned to me and said he thought Ali would like this song. He said he thought it was different now for boxers and he had no respect for Tyson, but Ali and Joe Frazier, they were the best, they had something, and here he stumbled over the right word but got it finally: "they had *integrity*." That word coming at me again. He voiced it carefully, with a tone of tenderness or even of loss, as if testing to see if I knew what integrity meant, really. I gave him some dollars and got up to leave.

"Hey, what's your name, man?"

I told him.

"Well, Dan, you have a good life, okay." He said it with that same tone of tenderness and I believed he meant it. He might have said it to anybody but at that moment he wasn't saying it to anybody but me.

When I left what stuck with me was the image of his big, dirty hands, one with a scab the size of a dime, playing those strings. Maybe he had been in a fight lately himself. And it wasn't the line so much about integrity that I got caught on, but something else he'd said. He had told me about the phone calls he had made after the WTC attacks with the little money he'd had on him at the time. He had called to tell all those he cared about that he loved them.

It is that thought that strikes a match in the dusky light, in the dimness inside me. *His* community. A little different definition,

maybe, a little more basic than Ian Frazier's in On the Rez. A homeless man calling home.

Suddenly, I found myself considering how courage and integrity and thinking for yourself, how realness and authenticity, would never be enough, how they'd never be anything but a part of leading. They might drop you off at the bus stop along the way, but they couldn't take you farther than half-way. The point of going down and in is to find the ground *under* the brokenness: our life together. It's a troubled and magnificent journey and that's exactly where love would be. We are not here simply to find a shared sense of Comfort and Control. We're here to find out what's beneath all the cycles of change we go through, separately and together.

I went back to my hotel room contemplating the mystery of our mutual dependencies, all the times and places we stop being strangers. I looked west out my hotel window at the darkened ocean. I was safe, warm, back in my own personal zone of Comfort and Control, watching for something out there I couldn't yet put my finger on. A loose end. Then the feelings came. I asked myself, who's doing the real work in this world anyway? Whose life is more precious? Is his job, his presence out there on the beach, less important than anyone else's?

It's too late to tell him in person, so I say it to the night sky: "Tony, you have a good life, too, okay?"

I think of Stafford's poem again. I think of the star, the many stars, that rise out of the darkness. I touch the void and come back home.

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