



SOPHIA ASSOCIATES

Awakening Leadership Within

Choosing a Creative Stance

In conversations with successful entrepreneurs and executives I have noticed that there is an internal thinking process that supports resiliency and fulfillment and also another thinking process that despite being outwardly successful, compromises the individual's energy and sense of achievement. To the public, each may exhibit the traditional signs of success – money for the organization and for self, prestige, status and praise. Yet one executive will feel tired, worn out and even defeated while the other feels energized, happy and optimistic.

In conversations with these clients, I determined that there is an underlying “stance” taken by each one that either energizes or depletes the individual even as the measurements of success may be similar. One is a *creative stance*, where the individual is drawn or inspired by the vision of something they wish to create or have exist. The other stance is a *stance of avoidance* or a *reactive stance* that sources from fear. Larry Wilson and Hersch Wilson, (authors of "Play to Win!") claim that there are "Four Fatal Fears": the fear of failure, the fear of being wrong, the fear of being rejected and the fear of being emotionally uncomfortable. What happens when an individual is able to shift from the reactive stance to the creative stance is a powerful transformation that allows the full potential of the individual to reveal itself.

The Reactive Stance vs. The Creative Stance

William (fictional name) is a successful entrepreneur of a mid-sized company with about 100 employees. He is married with two children. He is a marathon runner and finds that running clears his thinking and helps him handle stress. He travels quite a bit. William is always tired. He began coaching because he wants to retire early from the company and claimed that he wanted to begin exploring alternatives to his current career. He told me that in five years he wanted to do a number of things. I asked him if he was waiting to be happy in five years. He realized that yes, that was what he was doing, that everything was waiting for him five years from now and that he hadn't even considered that he could access any of this now.

I asked him to explain what motivated him. Talking about his running he explained that he was very disciplined and that he ran his business with the same discipline as his running. We explored what his thinking was during a marathon, especially as he neared the finish line. “My thinking is, I can't lose,” he said. I asked him what his thinking was as he neared the closing of a substantial contract. “I can't lose this contract or ____ would happen.” I asked him about how he developed new products and services in his company. He determined that he needed to innovate to avoid losing market share to his competitors. In his personal life, his children attend private school. He joked how he needed to assure his kids would graduate from the private school or “they might not get into a good college”. Throughout our conversation he alluded to “losing” and a stance of avoidance. He was motivated by the drive to avoid consequences and outcomes that he feared would occur.

I asked William to consider running a marathon with an intention to win instead of running with an intention not to lose. At first he didn't understand. He visualized

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nearing the finish line and changing his thinking from "I can't lose" to "I am winning". He did run a marathon shortly afterwards and practiced this approach. He shared that he repeated this affirmation during the marathon and especially as he neared the end. He ran a record time for him and was surprised to feel energized and excited at the end instead of emotionally drained as he normally felt. "I felt lighter," he explained.

He began to notice that much of his language was oriented toward reacting to something instead of creating a new possibility. As the months passed, he began to practice a change in how he articulated what he wanted to achieve. Instead of not losing a contract he began to move with an intention of winning the contract. Instead of innovating as a response to shifts in the market he began to ask his team to brainstorm and anticipate new products and services that might serve clients in ways that they had not previously considered.

He reported that he and his team were "having a lot more fun". Instead of feeling like he was constantly struggling, he felt more "in the flow" of things, "more positive" and his energy level and well-being improved. His need for control, driven by his fear of failure, had diminished replaced by a stronger and more empowering relationship with his direct reports. The most surprising result was that he was working less, incorporating now some of the elements in his life that he had planned to do in five years and he and his company were still doing very well financially. He had believed that a creative stance that was based on flow had meant that he would need to stop or slow down. He was actually taking very similar actions and steps in his company but he was figuratively "standing in a different place", a place that incorporated more reflection, more ease and a belief in abundance instead of scarcity. This attitude of abundance made him feel more at choice in his actions. Previously his attitude of scarcity created a subtle but powerful belief that nothing could ever be enough and because of this, he was never able to feel as if he had achieved anything of value or personally fulfilling. Everything had been an effort and struggle so that he felt coerced by outside (imagined) forces to do or not do certain things regardless of their actual benefit.

When leaders act out of fear, their actions and decisions are often reactive. The focus is on controlling others or controlling a situation. In this environment the leader affects the organization by limiting the creative potential of its people. Individuals in the organization eventually abdicate their decision-making and lose their inspiration. Both the leader and the organization cease to grow.

By understanding the stance a leader takes he/she can be diligent about focusing on themselves and their leadership as a model for others in the organization. Demonstrating a creative stance where relationships are valued as resources, ideas are cultivated instead of suppressed, and mistakes are not penalized but viewed as additional information, the leader can move him/herself and the organization towards a vision with greater ease and flow.

Listen to your language and your thoughts. If you are focused on avoiding something or taking actions that are motivated by fear you are in a reactive stance, moving from an attitude of scarcity. In this stance, nothing will ever be enough and your energy and creativity will be depleted by the need to control others and events. If you are in the creative stance, you will feel excited and exhilarated by the possibility of bringing something into being that you feel is worth the risk, time,

energy or money. You may still work long hours but you will feel differently, more positive and more decisive about the choices you make.

So, where do you stand?

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