

ENCOURAGING EMERGING SAGE LEADERSHIP

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It is easy in our society to go to work and provide for your family and see this as your highest calling. To me it is a myopic view, and I wasn't raised that way. It is hard to make the decision to live outside of oneself and serve something higher and greater, but when that happens joy arises from serving others. Emerging Sage Leader

There are undoubtedly many young and old members of the community who are not civically engaged in Grass Valley or Nevada City. This begs the question of how these unengaged persons who possess sage leadership qualities can be identified and motivated. The emerging and senior sage leaders offer valuable suggestions—and cautionary notes as well.

A number of emerging sage leaders believe that civic engagement is not for everyone, that it makes little sense to formulate a strategy to promote it for larger numbers of community members if they aren't already inclined to it. However, most emerging sages say that specific steps can be taken to make civic engagement more attractive for community members who are potential sage leaders. They offer three main strategies, the first being the need for cultivation. A second is to be persistent in asking for involvement, and the third is to initially engage candidates in small, easy-to-do activities before proceeding to larger endeavors that match their increased interest and passion.

Three Strategies of Encouragement

Cultivating. Potential emerging sages can be nurtured through personal story-telling and exhibiting the gift of good example:

I don't think you can ever intellectually talk a person into serving because it doesn't make

practical sense. You have to be good at knowing when to invite someone to become involved, and once they get a taste they get hooked. Putting guilt on people to serve doesn't work. They have to desire it themselves.

They may be caught-up in family and not see their own potential, but I do. It is important for leaders to expose people to the bigger picture in small doses so they don't get overwhelmed. Try to spark their interest and then mentor them.

Asking. An essential assumption in the field of fund raising is that people need to be asked if they are going to contribute money to worthy causes. The same is true for civic engagement. Perhaps the opportunity hasn't represented itself yet, and candidates for civic engagement need to be invited. To be asked is really important, for most people who have leadership skills often will find a way to contribute:

People need to be continually asked if they are to get engaged. It is said that it takes seven repetitions to get something through to most adults, so we just need to keep asking them to get involved.

People need to be asked. It's interesting that I am not more involved in my kids' current school because nobody welcomed me. No one asked me to do anything. Another example is a woman who has worked with Community Support Network doing some facilitation, and who is very wise. The first thing she did was to ask us what we love to do. There can be a difference between what we love to do and what we're good at. Then, she asked us to identify the things we really hate to do. For me, I hate to make telephone calls.

You can avoid burning-out people by emphasizing their strengths and giving them discreet, do-able tasks – small chunks that they can accomplish and feel good about. Then you grow them from there.

One can always make the case that when you work for the social good, as in education or nonprofits, that you are serving your community. Ultimately what it comes down to is the

invite. There's willingness out there, but a personal invitation creates an awareness of what's needed and what the opportunities are.

People engage more if it is a personal issue or interest. Involvement does not have to be hard. We just have to be creative and provide different ways. For instance, our organization develops form letters for the disability community to sign and send for political activism. Social media can also help get more people involved in our community.

People generally get involved in things that have a well-defined construct, an objective that is achievable in a certain amount of time. And they get involved when they are solicited. We could enlist more people simply by asking them.

Sometimes people get paralyzed and don't know how to move toward their ultimate purpose. In such cases, I'd encourage them to do one small thing that's in line with their values. They don't need to make a major decision or commitment. That one small thing gets them moving in the right direction. To me, being "sage" means listening to one's heart.

Emerging sages identify other ways that potential sage leaders can be influenced to become involved in their community. One is to engage the young through interactive web platforms. Another is to come-up with community projects that are family friendly and family inclusive. A third is to develop a program on public civility. And, there is the inviting utopian proposal to trash all television sets:

Engaging young people by way of their preferred mediums for connecting could be a good start, such as designing more interactive web platforms and utilizing social networking to build momentum.

Many people I know work long hours and have young families. Time is a very limited commodity for them. Their civic involvement could be increased by coming up with projects that are family friendly and involve flexible scheduling.

Overall, I think the lack of political involvement may have to do with people perceiving it as threatening. They see people being vilified for expressing an opinion. County government department heads wanted to do a workshop on civic engagement, and we got into a discussion about civility. We wondered how we could get the public to be more civil in its discourse.

I think television is an evil. Many of the really engaged people I know don't watch it, and the folks who are home watching "Dancing with the Stars" are less engaged with our community. If people didn't watch TV, we'd have our community back. I have this vision of the TVs going off and everyone walking outside to meet their neighbors.

Becoming "Chief Evangelists"

One emerging sage observes that the APPLE Center promotes young leaders to become "chief evangelists" for civic involvement. Others suggest the need for a two minute "elevator speech" as a way to recruit mid-life persons to civic activities about which potential emerging leaders feel most passionate. They say it does no good to be quiet, that there is need to let people know there are opportunities in the community for them to get involved. They suggest it is also a matter of framing issues in a way that make them manageable: "Identify concrete steps that can be taken right now to make a difference." "Everything can't be solved at once, but we can create demonstration projects that provide evidence that something can be done."

Even more basic in addressing the challenge of civic recruitment is the need to ask. People simply need to be invited. For example, non-engaged mid-life adults can be cultivated to participate in one-time activities that involve their entire family. Or they can be asked to attend an event where the accomplishments of a community group are celebrated. Until they are invited, reticent members of the community might not know the value of what they have to contribute. They assume that their commitment must be large—consuming substantial time, energy, and even money. These men and women need to know that contributions at any level are valued, especially at the entry stage.

The emerging sage leader can also be an ambassador who links members of the community to one another. And this linkage doesn't occur just once. The ambassador helps newly-invited men and women to feel welcomed. The ambassador helps to reduce their insecurity, their sense of awkwardness, and their fear of isolation that often attends admission to a new group or organization.

Using Technical Knowledge

Another possibility having great potential is the use of social media among technologically-savvy men and women to provide information about civic engagement opportunities and to invite participation. Digital media can also be used to store and share information about available talents in a human resources bank; this can help younger members of the community learn about the civic engagements of others as well as the abundant opportunities for volunteer service in Grass Valley and Nevada City.

Then there is the alternative of institutionalizing the concept of civic engagement. Service learning is already being taught in the community's school systems, so it might be expanded to the adult population in ways that educate them about the value of civic engagement and the personal benefits to be gained from using their talents and time in this way.