

VII. The Preconditions for Deep Caring

William Bergquist and Gary Quehl

We have now set the stage by introducing the fundamental theme of our play: *deep caring*. We have identified the four roles of generativity and have identified the cast members who not only are providing the action but are also providing much of the script. We have also acquainted you with our four *Featured Players*. One more task needs to be completed in setting the stage. We want to provide a preliminary backdrop for this generativity play. What is required for someone to be generative? What do we need to engage in deep caring?

We specifically propose that deep caring requires the capacity to see our complex, unpredictable and turbulent world from several different perspectives. It also requires the willingness to act courageously in the midst of this complexity, unpredictability and turbulence. To understand how this capacity and willingness unfold, we turn to the remarkably insightful work done by William Perry (1998) concerning cognitive and ethical development. Perry conceived of a four stage developmental process. He identifies the first stage as *Dualism* – the tendency of some men and women to place everything into one or two categories: true/false, good/bad, honesty/dishonesty, etc. This dualistic stage often remains intact for many men and women as they mature, leaving them cognitively inflexible and often unable to generate much empathy or caring toward those people who are different from themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, political attitudes, abilities and disabilities.

These are the people who tend to stagnate later in life, finding it impossible or undesirable to support and encourage the younger generation (*Generativity Two*) or to provide support and encouragement to members of their community and the activities that nurture this community (*Generativity Four*). If they are active at all in their community, it is likely to be focused on a “special interest” project that is narrow in scope and often self-serving. While they may be interested in the preservation of traditions and heritage (*Generativity Three*), it is often at the expense of alternative traditions and heritages established by people different from themselves.

The third role of generativity among those who are *Dualists* tends to be destructive and either short-lived or enforced through violence and repression (as in “Generativity” Three of the Third Reich).

Perry proposes that *Dualism* will often give way to what he calls the stage of *Multiplicity*. In this stage of cognitive flexibility, a man or woman is likely to recognize that there are alternative claims to truth, goodness, and morality. However, in a variant on the dualistic perspective, they may also conclude that if there is no one truth, sense of goodness or moral stance, then anything goes! When this happens they tend not to trust any authority, since there is no one reliable source. They look to power (“Might makes right”) and expedience (“I will do what will advance my career and life.”). We are reminded of the 1960s in the United States, where multiplicity reigned among many young and old adults. Men and women of multiplicity show few signs of generativity. It is unfortunate if they are raising children, for they are likely to be inconsistent role models and callous in “caring” for their children. While dualists are likely to be harsh, but consistent parents (Generativity One), the multiplist parent is likely to be indifferent.

From multiplicity a maturing man or woman will often, according to Perry, move to greater cognitive flexibility once confronted with the complex patterns of life. They begin to see consistency in specific societies and cultures. They become convinced there are better ideas and more consistent values existing within specific communities. Perry identifies these people as *Relativists*. They recognize the differences among people in their lives, and they can appreciate and seek to understand these differences. These men and women are likely to be caring and thoughtful mentors and organizational leaders (*Generativity Two*), finding a way to encourage and support younger men and women or those with less experience who are different in some way from themselves. They engage different styles of mentoring and leadership when addressing the increasingly diverse workforce to be found in contemporary organizations.

Perry’s relativists are also likely to be more successful than their dualist and multiplist colleagues in serving the Generativity Three role. They embrace their own heritage, but are also able to recognize the value inherent in other heritages. As Catholics, for example, they see the value of a vibrant Protestant church, Jewish synagogue and Muslim mosque in their community. As a straight man or woman celebrating the sacred nature of marriage, they honor the decision of their gay and lesbian neighbors to seek out a similarly-sacred commitment to another person through

marriage. Relativists are also men and women who actively engage in activities that benefit their community (*Generativity Four*).

Perry suggests there is a fourth stage of cognitive flexibility that can produce even stronger and sustained motivation to enact generativity. He identifies this fourth stage as *Commitment-in-relativism*. At this stage, a generative person not only recognizes the value of alternative truths, value judgments, and moral compasses if they are coherently enacted within a specific community; they also possess a strong and sustained commitment to a specific set of truths, judgments and moral compasses of their own. They act upon these commitments rather than just supporting them or encouraging others who share their perspectives. It is this fourth stage that enables a full expression of deep caring. Again, *generativity and deep caring is about actions and deeds--not just words and feelings*.

One of our 100 Sage leaders sounded quite a bit like Michael Corleone with regard to his Italian upbringing and his deep commitment to family. Unlike Michael, however, this man found that some of the traditional values and perspectives with which he grew-up were at odds with the values he was coming to embrace as an adult. The cognitive dissonance caused by this clash in values motivated him to embrace the newer values and set aside the older ones. This is the essence of commitment-in-relativism and sets the stage for generativity:

As a young leader my style could have been characterized as explicit, external, assertive, confrontational, verbose, and earnest. There was this sense of needing to prove myself, to assure my worth or value, and to seek validation externally. I come from an Italian immigrant family, where many of these characteristics are cultural norms. However, I came to realize that while I was a rather effective young leader in terms of my tangible accomplishments, my leadership style often placed me at cross-purposes with my broader goal of fostering a more peaceful society. Because after all, I thought, if one cannot resolve conflicts and nurture peace in his or her own personal and professional interactions, how could one possibly believe in the attainment of global peace? That reflection helped me to evaluate and understand the role that I had played in creating or intensifying conflict, and it led me to a more self-disciplined approach to leadership—one that is still assertive but inclusive in reflecting more humility and compassion, and that allows more space for a diversity of opinions and perspectives. Sometimes, I find my

old leadership qualities creeping into emotionally-charged situations, but I now have the maturity to hold myself accountable for those transgressions without it affecting my overall sense of self-worth and effectiveness.

A second Sage leader whom we interviewed similarly had to confront his dualistic beliefs and alter them:

When I was younger, certainty was the source of my passion. That is, I believed that something was right or wrong. Today, when the feeling of certainty arises, I let it go because it creates a barrier to creativity and collaboration. Instead of certainty, I've cultivated a stronger attitude about curiosity, which is a much more expansive state of consciousness.

A third person interviewed for the Sage project expressed similar sentiments:

As a young leader I thought it was my job to always have an answer. I felt I needed to have the proper response to every question. While I think there is value to a leader who can provide sage advice and input, experience has taught me that it is more important to ask the right question than have the right answer. The value in posing the question is it gives me an opportunity to gather responses, hear different points of view, build consensus, and come to the best decision. That being said, I've also learned that respect is often gained when the leader is willing to make those tough decisions that may not be popular with others, but are the right ones to make.

The movement from certainty to compassion that is exemplified in the following Sage interview suggests that there are indeed decision points with regard to the stance one must take as a precondition to active generativity:

I think the heart of my leadership is compassion. I've seen so much in my family, things happening to the people I loved. I am fascinated by the failings and possibilities of human beings, and I have an underlying strong belief in the goodness of humanity. I always try to look at something with a multi-faceted view, to understand the alternative perspectives in any situation. When I was younger I was more strident, with strong political views. Now I'm more accepting of others. Everyone has a story, and I try to keep that in mind. I

respect where people are coming from and try to learn something from every situation I encounter.

The stage is finally set. Members of the audience have taken their seats. The lights have dimmed. The actors step forward . . . We are now ready to explore each of the four deep caring roles and the ways in which generativity plays out in a variety of different, though interrelated ways. The first act concerns generativity as played out in the raising of children or the initiation of a special project.