

XIV. The Enactment of Generativity Two: Legacy and Leadership

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In preparing most of our essays in *Caring Deeply*, we have turned to our own research findings about Generativity Two, relying primarily on the 100 interviews that we conducted with Emerging and Senior Sage leaders in Western Nevada County California. In later essay, we will review some of the analyses that have already been done on Generativity Two—including a few excerpts from several Eriksonian researchers about this second generative role. In this essay, we turn not to the Eriksonian notion of Generativity Two, but rather to some of the insights offered by our Sage leaders about the broader notions of generativity we identified in our previous essays.

Generativity: The Alternative Definitions

Our Sage leaders seem, at some level, to fully appreciate this broader definition. For instance, the following observation is made by one of our Senior Sage leaders when asked to indicate what he most values in other leaders:

I most admire leaders who pay attention to the key facts of a situation, who don't rush to judgment. I also admire people who are intellectually strong and know their subject, who can speak with accuracy at various levels, who make themselves relevant to others, and who lead others to a consensus decision and help others own it. I believe and hope these qualities characterize my leadership style, which have been augmented by the gifts given to me.

Another Sage leader identifies similar factors that have enabled leaders with whom she has worked to be successful:

My experience is that leaders of most organizations think they know their organization's full potential, but actually have no idea. Just like we as individuals think we know

ourselves. So, there usually is so much more that we can accomplish as an individual or as a group. Our possibilities are limitless, and all it takes is visualization, actualization, and execution.

The above two observations seem to capture all three of the alternative definitions of generativity we identified in previous essays. These Sage leaders certainly admire the analytic and relational skills that are needed to generate creativity and innovation--skills we identified in the last essay (Liedrka's generativity cycle). They also seem to have captured the essence of entrepreneurship--especially as entrepreneurial energy and dedication are directed by a compelling vision.

Some of our other Emerging and Senior Sage leaders have provided even more detailed perspectives on these alternative modes of generativity. We turn first to analytic skills.

Analytic Skills

One of our Sage leaders focuses in particular on leaders who offer an open-minded and visionary perspective when analyzing the situation in which they find themselves as leaders:

I admire humility in effective leaders. Everyone must be treated as having equal importance. I also admire open-mindedness in leaders. To be effective, the leader must be able to see things from a different perspective—call it a vision—to keep followers from spinning their wheels. They are able to say, “Have you thought about this direction? Let’s stand back and have a look at it.” I do think there are times when I see things that other people aren’t seeing and that I can bring a different perspective to a situation.

For this Sage leader it is not just a matter of leaders being bright and filled with insights; they must also possess the relational skills that can lead other people to insightful conclusions.

Another Sage leader reflects on her own leadership competencies and turns specifically to the formulation of analytically-sound questions:

Regarding my own leadership qualities, a number come to mind: asking big questions, listening carefully to others, trying to glean the truth from a situation, and if truth is elusive to ask more questions. Once again, it is the quality of verifying the thinking of others. Even though I had been in leadership roles all of my life, I had not thought of myself as a leader until I began to observe other leaders very carefully and discover that I am much like them. This took a long

time. A lot of this came from my dad, who was a highly successful business leader. I watched him as an executive and saw he was a good role model.

Yet another Sage leader focuses on collaborative problem-solving skills when reflecting on the nature of effective leadership. She noted that problem-solving is actually a multi-skilled endeavor:

Being a good problem-solver is the one thing I have respected most in leaders I have worked with. Someone who says, "I'll handle that. I'll figure a way to solve that problem." I try to do that, and get volunteers and others on my committee to do that. It requires being very objective about what needs to get done. It involves a whole bunch of qualities—skills, ability to deal with people, intellectual capability.

We conclude this brief venture into the analytic skills needed to be an effective leader (and effective agent of Generativity Two care) by turning to a lengthier analysis made by one of our Sage leaders regarding what doesn't work:

There are two mistakes that leaders make. One is over-control. I have lots of examples where people may not understand how to do a job, and a supervisor explains it to them and then takes over the task while the volunteers stand around with their hands in their pockets. People aren't going to stand around very long because they didn't volunteer for that. Yelling and criticizing is also what I mean by over-control. Some leaders also make the mistake of looking too closely over someone's shoulder. Instead, let them make mistakes, let them try, and then show them what's wrong and they won't make the mistake again. The second mistake I see is people making assumptions and generalizations that lead to problems, like assuming someone knows what they're supposed to be doing and they're told "Go over there and do that." And the next thing you know they are making errors that could have been avoided. In some ways these two issues, over-control and assumptions and generalizations, are two sides of the same coin.

We suggest that "sides of the same coin" refers explicitly to the coin of analytic reasoning and, as our other Sage leaders have noted, to several other sides of the same coin-- the complex and interrelated coins of vision, effective questioning, and collaborative problem-solving.

Relational Skills

We turn now to the second element identified by Liedrka about the generativity cycle, which has to do with the skills needed to build a collaborative relationship. With regard to the role of Generativity Two, this means building relationships that are truly respectful and caring. Let's first consider the reflection offered by a Sage leader about her own leadership strengths:

In thinking about my principal leadership strengths, I believe I have a good balance among personal style, ability to build relationships, and political capability. And all of this is rooted in action. Of these, building personal relationships is most important to me and probably best defines my leadership style. I also have the ability to be a quick study of people and decide whether to connect with them or not. I can immediately determine whether I'd like to get to know the person, or if the person possesses something important that I'd like to learn. I guess this came from all of the hiring I did in one of my early Bay Area jobs. I got to be very good at assessing people's strengths and weaknesses and at making "yes" or "no" decisions on whether to hire.

For this Generativity Two leader, it is a matter of first assessing the other person, then building a relationship that is compatible with this assessment. We also see in this Sage leader's statement a translation of skills learned while in a corporate setting to the civic leadership (Generativity Four) that she provides in her community.

One of our Emerging Sage leaders identifies his move to a more collaborative leadership style as a product of the corporate culture in which he worked (management in *The Gap*, a large clothing store corporation). His culture was a facilitator of collaboration rather than being a barrier:

As I grew, I figured out how to delegate properly. This has taken a long time, but I think I get it now. *The Gap* really helped me in this way. My leadership style has changed from doing it myself to relying on a team of qualified people to do the same level or even better quality work than I would do myself. Having an awareness of this is probably the biggest change in my leadership style.

Another Sage leader describes a process whereby she temporarily sets aside her analytic skills on behalf of relationship building:

I have learned to reserve judgment and not be quick in making decisions based on the first thing that comes to my mind. I now take time to gather adequate information. I don't like people who

come in and waste my time, but sometimes it is necessary to allow certain staff members to do that because it is valuable for the other person to express their concerns or views. There is value in the process, even if I know where the conversation is heading. This helps build a relationship with the person, whether I agree with that person or not.

One of the other leaders we interviewed for our Sage project offers a candid assessment of his own maturation with regard to relationship-building. He reminds us that relational skills are not always easy to either learn or apply:

It took a long time, but I am learning to listen and develop patience. I also believe I am pretty good at building relationships among diverse individuals and groups. The most important may well be that my staff used to say I was a visionary. Developing patience and listening skills, building relationships, and being a visionary seem to be my main strengths.

It is interesting to note that this Sage leader not only emphasizes vision; he also points to patience and listening skills, which often seem in short supply when observing our contemporary society in operation.

Finally, one of our Sage leaders offers a wonderful interweaving of analytic and relational skills. He would be a perfect role model for Liedrka's generativity cycle:

My major strength is an ability to bring together groups of people, help them to find common ground, and to share motivation and vision. I do this through building personal relationships. I like ideas and am good at getting groups of people to accomplish things. I like to find people who are better than me at implementing ideas, and then empowering and helping them do the job.

Entrepreneurial Skills

Liedrka's generativity cycle seems to require not just analytic and relational skills, but also the capacity to get something done. This is the heart of the entrepreneurial spirit and requires its own set of generative skills. The following observation reveals something about this skill set:

I don't consider myself a leader, but others do. They give me a job, and I do it. When people want to help with a goal, I always find a way to get them involved. And I never turn them down. The job of a leader is to have vision, which I think I have. But I also know who to ask when I don't. I can always find someone with a different perspective that can help plan. I am not cocky

and also treat everyone as an equal. When you treat people as an equal, they do things you would never think that they would do. I get people who find themselves doing amazing things, and I believe they feel they can do them because they are respected.

We particularly like the label given by one of our Sage leaders about entrepreneurship: “Two words come to mind when I think of effective leadership: *gentle fierceness*. You have to have compassion and be a good listener. You also have to be grounded and be able to cut through like an arrow to the truth of the matter. And understand what is being asked and what is being required.”

We conclude this brief journey into entrepreneurship as a generative act by noting that many of our Sage leaders have come to recognize that entrepreneurship requires patience and a recognition that change does not happen overnight. It seems from all of our sources, that generativity of all kinds requires patience – whether we are relating to our own children, guiding a cherished project, mentoring a younger colleague, or advocating for an important cause.

Appreciation as Source of Energy and a Foundational Process

We now turn to the second and third alternative definitions of generativity by suggesting that both of these forms, when applying in an interpersonal setting where caring takes place, are fulfilled in the act of appreciation. Appreciation, in turn, is about identifying the strengths and potentials in other people and the possibilities to be found in challenges we confront. It is about "catching people when they are doing it right!" and "seeing each challenge as a door opening to a new possibility." One of our Sage leaders hits on this point directly:

I like collaborative leaders. Some people advocate or lead from a sense of outrage. This approach may have a role, but I don't respect it. What I do admire is a leader who looks at possibilities and holds them by opening doors and asking questions. I want to be like that, and am to some extent. I emulate people who I see as effective. It's more “appreciative” in nature, and I didn't even know that term until I met a colleague in our county's health and human service agency as a great example of a leader I admire tremendously. He allows and encourages the people under him to be good at what they do—and that's certainly an emerging part for me. He's also so thoughtful and kind and

has a broad perspective. I just love working with him. His boundaries are not so tight that you can't move inside them.

Appreciation is also to be found in the recognition of one's own strengths and enduring values. Integrity and authenticity come with this recognition and the capacity to act consistently from them. We appreciate ourselves while appreciating other people. This seems to be critical in engaging all forms of generativity.

We conclude this return to alternative definitions of generativity by offering a particularly astute set of observations made by one of our Sage leaders about the power of appreciation as a leverage point for the generation of energy and strategies for collaboration. Generativity seems to reside, finally, in a commitment to vision and the movement beyond one's personal interests (setting aside ego):

I have seen leaders make several serious mistakes. One is confusing the organization with its mission. It's very easy for the organization to take on a "will to survive," similar to "the guardian" within us as individuals. This can blind those in the organization from exploring collaborations or even mergers that could better achieve the mission. It can also cause organizations to develop competitive rather than resource-sharing strategies. It can get all mixed-up with protecting one's job and personal survival needs. And it takes courage to keep focused on the mission, especially in times of shifting paradigms and challenging economic issues.