

# **Essay XXIII: Generativity Four—Generative Roles and Responsibilities**

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There are a variety of ways in which sage leaders say they help the organizations in which they are primarily engaged in their Generativity Four roles.

## **Emerging Sage Leaders**

Seven themes reflect how the 50 Emerging Sage leaders say they most help their favored civic organizations: personal leadership, specialized expertise, collaboration, finance and fund development, youthful presence, thoughtful listening, and serving as mentors.

### **Providing Personal Leadership**

By far the most important contribution that most Emerging Sages make is in providing personal leadership. Sometimes this involves serving as founder of an organization. For others it entails providing vision, great execution, leading through others, or simply being able to bring executive level experience to the table. Many Emerging Sages say they lead by being the public face and voice of their organization, and in building effective relationships with the community. Others lead by developing new and innovative programs, in making certain that the doors of city hall are kept open to all the people, in undertaking needed strategic planning, or in working to turn-around organizational culture. Says one Emerging Sage leader who recently was a city mayor of Grass Valley:

One of the things we did was to meet with all the city employee groups and really listen to what they had to say. Without any attempt to manage outcomes, we just sat down and had discussions with them. I believe we held six meetings in all. It was good to listen to their concerns, and to hear how they have helped people in our community in ways we don't always get to learn about.

Another Emerging Sage leader expresses her leadership role this way:

My leadership in the areas of administration and strategic planning has helped us to begin evolving from an all-volunteer group of passionate individuals into an organization with paid staff, good bylaws, a better sense of our tangible goals, clearer agendas, and more work being done through committees. We need a strong functioning board, and I'm helping us move toward that.

## **Offering Specialized Expertise**

A second way that Emerging Sages most help their favored organization is by offering specialized expertise. This involves such things as providing staff training and professional development, planning and implementing social activities, developing organizational outcome objectives, and helping to integrate services. One mentions her role in strengthening systems:

Although it's a small organization, there are certain systems that need to be in place no matter what the size. I think in terms of systems – both administrative and strategic—so I've been able to bring some systems and tools to the organization, including communications.

## **Promoting and developing collaboration**

Promoting and developing collaboration is a third way that Emerging Sage leaders most help their favored organization. Sometimes this involves strengthening connections between nonprofit organizations and government services. At other times it requires representing their agency in community partnerships or in communicating with other organizations and community members:

I have most helped by carrying public health beyond the four walls of the health department with community-based collaborative efforts. I have also helped to develop a chronic disease prevention program with non-traditional partners, like non-profits, environmental groups, and transportation and agriculture.

## **Providing finance and fund development expertise**

The fourth way that Emerging Sage leaders are helping their favored civic organizations is through finance and fund development expertise. Their assistance includes identifying financial problems and opportunities and ensuring transparency and sound financial practices.

In the area of fund development this includes putting “best practice” policies and processes in place, writing grant proposals, soliciting money from donors, and taking calculated risks:

When I first started, I spent a lot of time trying to understand the organization's business practices, which were few at that point. Staff were just waiting for the phone to ring to rent the theater, but it wasn't happening. The biggest challenge was understanding that you can't make a profit off a 300 seat theater when you're only charging \$20 per ticket. The big questions were, “Should we continue to exist? Are we truly needed?” Once we realized we had to take some risks and bring in bigger shows, we were able to raise the price of tickets and began selling out. We brought in big acts at \$50 a ticket and found that many people would buy them.

### **Providing Youthful Energy**

One of the Emerging Sage leaders observes that most service clubs are filled with very senior men and women. He suggests that he brings youthful energy to these clubs and new initiatives that can be attractive to the youth population of Grass Valley and Nevada City. However, this young Sage leader also offers a balanced perspective when he expresses deep and abiding respect for the wisdom and history being brought to the community and service clubs by Senior Sage leaders.

This balancing suggests a process of reciprocity: youthful energy in exchange for the lessons learned from older sage wisdom: “I just sit there and listen.” He notes rich insights to be gained from the careers of Senior Sage leaders, insights that seem relevant to the career of this Emerging Sage. It is not so much the conversations that take place during and after the service club meetings; it is just being in the presence of these wise older leaders and listening to them.

### **Engaging in Thoughtful Listening**

Emerging Sages view themselves as contributing most to their organizations when they engage in thoughtful listening to what is said by everyone present; they then reflect on the experience. While they bring youthful energy to their organizations, most Emerging Sages try to do so in a calm and deliberative way. Unlike their earlier adult years, they no longer leap to a solution but, rather, encourage and appreciate diverse perspectives and alternative answers to complex community problems their organizations are facing.

### **Becoming Mentors**

Emerging Sage leaders are often at a point in their lives where they are being mentored by older Leaders—and they are also themselves becoming mentors to younger men and women in Western Nevada County. They relish this new role, having in many instances moved away from the all-embracing ambitious push for personal achievement and individual recognition. They feel a bit mellower and are pleased with their shift from arrogance to humility, and from trying to do everything themselves to assisting others get work completed and ensuring they get credit for it. This is an important transition in the lives of Emerging Sage leaders, and in the ways they learn how best to serve their community.

We know from research that has been conducted on mentoring that many men and women who were not mentored during their early years find it hard to mentor others in their adult years. Also, these people are more likely to “burn out” during their middle adult years than those who had experienced strong

mentoring support during the first years of their careers. Apparently, a haunting sense of loss or failed support may remain dormant during the early years of an adult's career—but comes back in full force later in life. It's as if there is a time bomb ticking, waiting to be set off during one's late 40s and early 50s.

These findings suggest that a move toward generativity among Emerging Sage leaders—rather than a retreat into stagnation—may be traced to an early successful experience in being mentored. Now, as Emerging Sages, they can “return the favor” by themselves becoming successfully engaged mentors. They become good listeners and strive to empower others in their organization, and they take on the mentor-oriented roles of community-connector and relationship-builder. This transition from mentee to mentor may be an important element in the creation of a sustainable community. Furthermore, this mentoring role may be particularly compatible with a new model of leadership that these Emerging Sage leaders seem to reflect.

## **Senior Sage Leaders**

The 50 Senior Sage leaders say they most help their favored civic organizations in four ways. Like their Emerging Sage colleagues, they provide leadership and specialized expertise. They also enhance communication and provide financial treasure.

### **Providing Personal Leadership**

Senior Sages report they most help through their personal leadership. Often this involves bringing vision and providing sage advice to the nonprofit boards on which they serve, developing trust, reminding other board members what is needed to be effective, helping the board to work as one, and being able to plan effectively and focus on what to do next.

It also has to do with the ability to attract a highly diverse and talented group of leaders onto the board, nurturing the executive director, listening to people and staying tuned to their motivations, and thanking volunteers. Two Senior Sages describe their leadership role this way:

Early on I was approached to lead fund development and found that a different approach was needed. It was important to have all of our business sponsorships for the coming year committed by the end of November. We had never done this before. We obtained a pledge from businesses before the year started and received commitments up to \$600,000. We learned that long-term relationship-building is the way to create and sustain a sound fund development program, and that acknowledging and recognizing major donors are key.

I most helped when I came onto the board about two years ago thinking I would serve for a while and eventually take on a leadership role. But when I arrived the organization was in a crisis that split the board, and a number of people left. I was asked to stand for the board presidency in a contested election and was elected. Guiding the organization during that time was extremely critical, and I am proud that we got through the transition with no breakage even when there was some hostility, anger, conflict, and board members leaving. We do not have any residual bad feelings in the sense that some people may not particularly like each other, but no one is out to sabotage the organization or speak badly of it. As a result, the organization has ascended to a higher level in the last several years.

### **Offering Specialized Expertise**

The second most common way that Senior Sage leaders help their favored organizations is by offering specialized expertise. Sometimes this involves strategic planning talent, navigating conflict, using mediation skills, or teaching the business side of nonprofits:

I have brought a pure business sense in my church to overlay the spiritual faith-based perspective of “Reach and spend money you don’t have and it will all work out!” Well, what if it doesn’t work out? I have been a grounding point and have also coordinated meetings with consultants. So I think I have brought business and coordinating skills to how we know who’s on first and who’s on second, what we are we doing about our financial commitments, and how we are going to finance the whole thing.

Then there are Senior Sages who possess in-depth knowledge of a complete field of endeavor or an organization’s history:

I have a deep history and understanding of what it takes to deal with the arts in Nevada County, and I think that’s my value at this point.

I believe I serve my organization best by being an idea person, a teacher, and a living memory of what has occurred since its founding. Also, some of the programming and projects we have done have either been my invention or co-invention. Increasingly, with new members coming onto the board with extraordinary experience, the need for me to play this role lessens—and that is a good thing.

### **Ensuring Effective Communication**

Ensuring effective communication is a third way Senior Sage leaders most help their favored civic organizations. Sometimes this involves providing leadership in telling the organization's story to the outside world:

Helping the hospital to effectively communicate its story has given me a great deal of meaning and satisfaction. The hospital is probably the largest non-government employer in Nevada County. Yet hospital management barely knew who the mayors and council members of our two cities were. For this reason, I encouraged hospital management, physicians, and nurses to become more involved in local community issues. This initially met with resistance because management didn't want to be put in a position of looking as if the hospital was taking sides on issues. In time, however, management came to realize that some issues are in their own self-interest—like the need for employee affordable housing. The hospital now has a vice-president for marketing, and this person gives regular feedback to hospital management from community stakeholders.

## **Raising Funds**

Nonprofit organizations are always in search of money to carry out their special missions. Most often this involves Senior Sages helping their organizations to raise funds or to contribute money themselves:

I've helped the organization most by fundraising, and over the years have given a considerable sum myself. And then talking it up with others. Donation solicitation must be done peer-to-peer, because people of a certain status understand each other and communicate more freely. I've tried to lead by example.

When our Executive Director resigned just before our major summer musical festival, I added to my portfolio as Board President the position of Co-Executive Director. In order to save the organization, we mobilized the Board to respond to this serious situation. Then we had to mobilize the community to respond from an emotional perspective if we were to preserve this wonderful community treasure. As Board President, I had to set a good example and draw upon my organizational skills.

And some Senior Sages apply wise experience in helping their favored organizations to understand how best to approach others for funding over the long-term:

We have emphasized relationship-building rather than simply asking people for money. If you ask someone for money, that's just one shot. But if you build a relationship and they believe in what you are doing, then you can have that relationship forever—if you continue to cultivate and

sustain it. So, in emphasizing relationship-building, we ask people what they want and then give them feedback on how our organization is helping.