

Deep Caring XXV: Generativity Four—The Satisfaction of Civic Engagement

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As we have done with the first three generativity roles, we now explore the compelling reasons and rewards for Generativity Four. We approach these reasons from two perspectives. We turn to the first perspective (satisfaction) in this essay. We begin with the return of one of our four *Featured Players*, Lisa, the woman who faced the Generative One challenge of raising a developmental disabled nephew and took care of her ill mother for many years before moving to Nevada County. We pick up Lisa's narrative as she describes her role as a mentor (Generativity Two), and then moves on to a broader description of her role as a civic leader:

Several days ago I heard this definition of mentoring: a person who helps another individual reach potential. So to me, a mentor is a person who helps someone learn. I have never specifically seen myself as a mentor, but in retrospect I know I have. One of the things I learned when I termed off the board of our umbrella non-profit service organization is that I couldn't put my finger on any other organization that I had a passion for. What I realized was that I really love to help people, regardless of the organization. If someone needs help, and it is something that I can do well, I will do it. In this way I have been, and continue to be, a mentor. Regardless of the role that I might play at any given time, I see myself as a person who can create excellent teams and teamwork. I really do this well and enjoy it. To me, this is also being a mentor.

Lisa also addresses an important question about the meaning and satisfaction of Generativity Four Civic Engagement:

I think back to when I arrived in Nevada County. After a life-time of successful professional work as a clinical psychologist, I just wanted a little job instead of being in charge of anything; the time had come for me to kayak, learn to fly fish, and hike a lot. I've now been here seven years and haven't done any of this. What started out as a little job quickly turned into me being invited to become executive director of a major arts organization here. The organization was in deep trouble; it had a board that was dragging it down, and there was little internal structure. In addition, the organization was deeply in

debt. Becoming the ED was the best job I ever had. Even though the organization could only be sustained for another two and one-half years, we made a lot of progress. One thing I am proud of is that we stabilized the organization by developing a dynamic team, both the artistic and administrative side. Every one gave their best. The organization was greatly loved for twenty years. Then a new leader had come in and made some bad decisions that created a lot of angst in the community. She basically didn't care what the community thought.

So, what did draw Lisa into extensive civic engagement and organizational leadership? She was ready for a leisurely life of retirement, doing those things she had long looked forward to, and Nevada County is a perfect location for these pursuits. Yet, Lisa indicates that she hasn't "done any of this." Was she drawn to civic engagement only to save one organization that was in trouble or was there something more that drew her to this work? Is the "bigger picture" that we briefly identified at the end of Chapter Eleven somehow involved in the new priorities set by Lisa?

In seeking to make sense of Lia's Generativity Four and the allure of civic engagement in the lives of other people, we first identify the primary sources of satisfaction in civic engagement, then investigate the underlying motivations. Because the principal sources seem to be "frosting on the cake," they may at times be surprising for generative leaders like Lisa. The motivations, on the other hand, are there from the start. They are what gets Generative Four leaders going in the first place.

It is not surprising that Sage leaders of all ages continue to work in their favored civic organizations, because they derive great personal satisfaction and meaning from these Generativity Four experiences. Both Emerging and Senior Sage leaders deliver the message that what they especially enjoy about their civic involvements is work with other people. For them, Generativity Four civic engagement is not only about seeking the betterment of their community; it's about collaborating with others to bring this result about—to engage collectively the "bigger picture." In sum, most satisfaction comes from bringing together an engaged group of people to mobilize and achieve a shared civic goal.

Emerging Sage Leaders

The sources of generative meaning and satisfaction for Emerging Sages include achieving organizational success, aiding others, helping the community to improve, the intense feelings that can arise from collaboration and consensus-building, and personal and professional growth.

The primary Generativity Four satisfaction that Emerging Sages get is participating in activities *that lead to the achievement of organizational goals*. Specific examples include: opening a new high school on the assumption that there is more than one way to go about education, leading school culture away from intimidation and bullying to a place where everyone can be heard and respected, turning around an organization's reputation, knowing that a government agency is making a huge difference, finding a committed group of people who really want to change the school food program, mentoring an executive director, learning that systems integration can work, and a surprise discovery that teamwork can reduce school layoffs while sustaining governmental services in the face of budget cuts:

What is most meaningful and satisfying is that our efforts have led to an ability to sustain most core Health & Human Services programs. When one branch is operating in the red due to the vagaries of funding, another branch helps out until solutions are found. There is a pendulum of funding in hard times. By pulling together and thinking creatively, we are able to sustain more than we ever could by retreating to our individual silos.

Emerging Sage leaders also derive great satisfaction in learning they have *assisted others* and made a difference in their lives. This is where Generativity Four meets Generativity Two. Examples include projects for youth and the elderly, helping kids who have a terrible home experience, developing work programs for families on public assistance, seeing what a difference mentoring makes in a child's life, and finding loving homes for abandoned dogs. And there are also the intimate encounters in helping others:

I get to see everything I am working toward in the faces of children every day. I feel confident I can walk into any classroom at any time and will see something amazing taking place. It is incredibly rewarding. And occasionally they make me brownies.

Seeing the results of *community improvement* is especially meaningful to many Emerging Sages. This ranges from great good that a Hospital Foundation does, to the incredible impact of 15,000 people coming from across the country to the Nevada City Film Festival, to the satisfaction that is derived from creativity and passion in making the community a better place in which to live:

I take a lot of satisfaction when business leaders in Nevada City say, “This was the best Victorian Christmas we’ve ever had.” I fully understand that a great Victorian Christmas can make their entire season because it feeds families and puts money into the economy, which trickles down and keeps schools and other things open.

The intense feelings that arise from *collaboration and consensus-building*, creating trust, seeing a complex plan come together, working interdependently in a positive way, and pulling people together for the common good—all have great, generative meaning for Emerging Sage leaders.

It gives me great satisfaction when people come to me for help. I can’t always fix everything for them, but I am happy to try and be a bridge-builder between people with problems and people with solutions. It makes me happy to be an accessible resource to people and to feel involved in their lives.

Generativity Four also can include *personal and professional growth*—especially for mid-career men and women. A number of Emerging Sages reflect on such personal benefits they have achieved from being engaged in their favored civic organizations. To one Emerging Sage leader this means having gotten through a long learning curve in becoming an executive director; to another mentoring from the county’s chief financial officer; and to a third having access to new learning opportunities.

One Emerging Sage leader sums-up the personal satisfactions gained by many of his Sage colleagues: “It is witnessing the limitless possibilities that come when people pull together.” Other Emerging Sages say much the same thing in different terms. One indicates she “likes working through conflict until the group reaches consensus”; another talks about “giving shape” to an organization that previously didn’t exist, while a third says she derives great satisfaction from bringing “credibility” to her organization. A fourth Emerging Sage reports tapping into the unique gifts that each member of the group brings to a project. All of this seems to be about

honoring diversity and bringing everyone together until there is a “finished vision” for the community.

Most Emerging Sages are “extreme doers” who seek to produce *tangible results*. They are impatient with talk, and at the end of the day want to feel a sense of accomplishment. They need to be achieving something all the time, and their civic engagements enable them to meet this need while benefiting other persons. For many of the Emerging Sages, the greatest reward comes from immediately being able to witness the outcomes of their civic involvement; it’s about getting to an end result from a passionately held idea—as in the case of Generativity Two, when men and women can directly witness the impact on their children or the benefits arising from their projects. Generativity Four is often about identifying a community problem and organizing people to solve it. While many Emerging Sage leaders say they derive satisfaction from translating an organization’s vision into tangible results, another identifies a different kind benefit; he talks about being a “translator” of the organization’s vision to the community.

Senior Sage Leaders

As with Emerging Sages, those experiences that provide Senior Sages with most generative meaning and satisfaction are organizational achievement and success, assisting others, helping to improve the community, teamwork, and personal and professional growth. In addition, some Senior Sages identify giving recognition to others as being highly meaningful (a blending of Generativity Three and Four).

Among the Generativity Four successes of Senior Sages are communicating the story about their *organization’s achievements* to the community, including fund raising objectives, implementing and tracking performance of a strategic plan against goals, running successful special events, creating a new business and then finding an adequate location for its operation, achieving significant artistic quality and audience appreciation, filling downtown retail spaces, shifting the governing board from being an advisory agency to a corporate entity, weathering a host of problems, and making a successful turn-around:

What is most satisfying to me these days is sitting in a meeting and listening to others talk about the organization, and reflecting on our accomplishments to date. And musing about all of the wonderful new things that are on the drawing board.

Helping to change the hospital's image from being a county hospital to becoming a really first-class health care facility and being recognized as such throughout the service area is very satisfying. We still have to work hard at this, but we have made a lot of headway. The more I get involved in the hospital, the more I realize how fortunate we are to have the quality of physicians, staff, and health care that we do. One of the nice additions has been the new specialty called hospitalist—whereby a physician practices at the hospital rather than having his or her own private practice.

The fact that we fill our retail spaces is a validation of what we do. By far our biggest success is what we have been able to achieve with a lot of people chipping in – business owners, professional people, and businesses outside of the downtown.

The blended Generativity Two and Four experiences that come from Senior Sages *assisting others* include seeing the success of young people, being a co-founder of a homeless shelter, and mentoring:

I get enormous satisfaction from watching kids at the Young Composers Concert and hearing feedback from audiences and donors about how important our organization is to their young lives.

Seeing the shelter open with people coming in and getting help, getting fed, getting sheltered during the terrible winter seasons, and having a welcome center open during the summer where they can get water, bug repellent, tents, or simply be taken care of if they're sick—all of this has been greatly satisfying to me. Moving from labor-intensive, low-yield special events to authentic fund development for the organization has also been gratifying. I know how to do this now for any organization, and I almost feel I want to be a professional fundraiser.

These generative women and men not only provide direct assistance (Generativity Two), but also broaden the scope of their generativity by seeing that other people are enacting Generativity Two activities.

Many Senior Sages derive their most meaning and satisfaction from brick and mortar *improvements in the community*:

The most satisfying was in being successful in finding land and a building and purchasing it without having the community being totally up at arms about the location. Also, obtaining grants and working with homeless families and seeing life changes in them have been very meaningful. Some of these families were totally out on the street, and the impacts on their children were horrible. So much of homelessness is caused by drugs. It has been a total education for me.

Whether working in partnership with their favored organization's executive director or collaboratively with others, many Senior Sages derive great satisfaction from *teamwork*:

What is most satisfying for me is when something gets accomplished and people start becoming engaged, see the potential, and get excited. That's fun.

And some Senior Sage leaders get personal satisfaction from the *deserved recognition that others receive* (a lovely blend of Generativity Three and Four):

One of the most satisfying results is to bring recognition to the many law enforcement and fire services people who don't get acknowledged for what they do to keep us safe. We serve an important role in letting the public know how fortunate we are to have such dedicated people protecting us.

Success Often Comes in Small Packages

The 50 Emerging and 50 Senior Sage leaders find gratification at many different levels when speaking about the satisfaction and meaning they derive from their work. It could be a small or big success. Most importantly, they experience their work as "making a difference." This seems to be critical and at the core of the Sage leader generative experience in civic engagement.

Sage leaders often say they gain most satisfaction from seeing changes in the people with whom they work: a mother and father being re-united, helping someone who is homeless getting food and shelter. This sense of success is particularly poignant in the case of Habitat for Humanity. Volunteers see a single parent work hard for 600 hours in helping to build and move into her new home. The new homeowner is not just handed a gift; she works alongside volunteers in constructing it. There is a profound sense of accomplishment for both the new homeowner and the volunteer homebuilders. It is these small successes that bring great satisfaction. Moreover, such successes helped to build a strong foundation for Habitat as an organization.

Small things amount to big results when it comes to the well-being of the community. Repeatedly, Sages note the benefit they receive from contributing in important ways to the quality of community life. In some instances, these community-wide contributions are acknowledged, but recognition and appreciation are not critical to Sage leaders – just nice, a sign that a vital link has been made between their organization and the community.

Sage leaders find it is not just a matter of being successful that is important; working with others to bring about the success is the heart of the matter. Sages report great, generative heart-felt joy and gratification in working toward a shared goal with the men and women who bring differing perspectives and talents to a common cause. Furthermore, when the shared goal is achieved, it is witnessed in very tangible ways—in the accumulation of many small successes.