

Deep Caring XXV: The Motivations of Generativity Four

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Throughout this series of essays, we have identified various sources of motivation that lead individuals to become generative and engage in deep caring activities. There are five motivations that seem to be particularly salient with regard to Generativity Four. They include *altruism*, the desire to give back to society and serve the greater public good; *self-interest*, doing what we want for our own benefit; *achievement*, being successful in situations that require excellent or improved performance; *affiliation*, wanting to be with people who are enjoyed; and *power*, the desire to have influence on situations or on others. All of these motivations have a place in the civic engagement world of Sage leaders.

Emerging Sage Leaders

Each of the five Generativity Four motivations is embraced by Emerging Sages, and *achievement* heads the list. As a motivator for civic engagement, organizational achievement is expressed in two principal ways. One is a desire to improve the community:

I am inspired by knowing that I am part of something larger than myself. One of my core values is community. Being able to be involved and help my community become a better place for my family, friends, and the next generation inspires me. I feel I am making a difference by taking steps toward my ultimate goal of working myself out of a job. In twenty years, I will be able to look back and see I was part of building something tangibly good in our community. I am doing what I said I would do. I will leave our community a better place.

The other important achievement motivator is to care for the natural environment:

I'm very excited and interested in creating sustainable communities. Western Nevada County is a wonderful Petri dish. We've done work trying to create a sustainable economy and creating sustainable agriculture. What about sustainable social systems? There's lots of possibility here.

The second greatest Generativity Four motivator for Emerging Sage leaders is *altruism*. This is expressed in three principal ways: seeking to help others, wanting to “give back,” and pursuing social justice:

I have dedicated most of my professional life to serving the poor... Much of this comes from my spiritual and philosophical beliefs. I believe in the power and importance of civic engagement, which is absolutely essential for the creation and maintenance of a healthy community.

A third generative motivator for Emerging Sage leaders is *affiliation*:

It's not “civic life” that motivates me. Rather, it's when people get engaged to do something positive that I'm inspired to participate. I want a seat at the table because I like to see something positive resulting from people coming together in common cause.

It really is about personal satisfaction and relationships. Outside of myself, this would especially include my kids. There is so much satisfaction in living in a community like this that values wellness, relationships, and quality of life. And we have great things being accomplished by extraordinary people, for example our two dynamic young women mayors.

And there is the motivation of person *power*:

I enjoy the process and the negotiations that take place in attempting to come away with a good solution. Part of this has to do with my ego, for I enjoy being in the limelight and receiving compliments from people for what I do.

It is not about money for Emerging Sage leaders. It is about Generativity Four. It is about giving back to the community in which they have chosen to live and, in most instances, raise a family. They talk about getting involved in the community and sharing exciting experiences with other emerging Sages. They discovered their community and now continue to create it, which fulfills their need for personal achievement and social connection. For them civic engagement is an escalating process: each experience is fulfilling and feeds the desire to do more. Further, in most instances the volunteer work being done correlates with the paid positions and responsibilities of

Emerging Sages. A judge or educator, for instance, works with at-risk youth during “free” time-Generativity One and Two meet Generativity Four.

This blending of paid and unpaid work on behalf of a specific passion is quite remarkable. In many contemporary American communities, government workers feel under-funded, unappreciated, and over-worked; and frankly, “burned out” in their formal jobs. They lack restorative energy and have little interest in adding further burdens to their lives by devoting more unpaid time to the same civic cause: “I’m already sacrificing a lot . . . so why do even more?” By contrast, the Emerging Sage leaders see themselves being involved in both formal and informal roles on behalf of their community; generativity Four is alive and well for them. They envision government as assisting and encouraging rather than providing all of the human services needed in Western Nevada County. Many Emerging Sages believe the role of government agencies is to facilitate the work of others—especially through nonprofit organizations that increasingly are risking the assumption of tasks traditionally provided by government. They see the need for government agencies to work across boundaries between themselves and others to solve community-based challenges.

The generative motivations of Emerging Sages seem to reside in the need for personal growth and the desire to contribute to the community’s sustainability. The challenges of civic engagement yield wonderful learning and skill enhancements that are great for resumes, but Emerging Sages rarely mention this benefit. At the community level their powerful motivation is to build an all-encompassing, sustainable community. And this isn’t just about the economy; it’s also about culture, social justice and compassion, and preserving their community’s distinctive natural beauty and vitality. Emerging Sages possess a pervasive sense of urgency because the challenges being faced in the community, state, and nation are onerous. These challenges will not be easily resolved. They must be confronted by multiple community-wide responses: “I am motivated because never before has there been such a need for change in the community.” “I have already seen tangible evidence that change can happen and that our community can benefit from it.”

Motivation for Generativity Four civic engagement also resides in the feedback that Emerging

Sages receive from others in the community. This feedback is often immediate and heart-felt, in part because Western Nevada County is not large. Many people know one another. One of the Emerging Sage leaders describes the experience of going to dinner with his wife and having young people that he has served coming to the table and thanking him for what he has done to make their lives better. He receives Generativity Two gratification. The Emerging Sages also feel “blessed” by relationships they have established with persons who share similar interests; they talk about having fun with their collaborators while finding shared gratification in the tangible results they achieve together. This is Generativity Four at work.

More than with the Senior Sage leaders, Emerging Sages can look long into the future and envision a community that is significantly better than it is now. They know in very tangible ways that their community impacts the quality of life they envision for their children. This sense of sustained community improvement is particularly moving in the case of those Emerging Sages who are able to trace their families in Grass Valley or Nevada City back as many as five generations. These men and women of “place” clearly understand that work done years ago by previous generations is now benefiting them. So, it is natural for them to work on behalf of their own children and future generations.

Of course, there is another side to this story. The hard-driving Emerging Sages have to face the ongoing challenge of there being too little time and too much to accomplish. They worry about wasting precious time that they do have available, and they believe their civic work must produce timely tangible results that are worth the effort. They also talk about not squandering opportunity; they live in a small community and are connected with others who are committed to the same important causes. This is something that people living in large, impersonal cities rarely have an opportunity to experience: “I don’t want to squander this chance that I have to make an impact on something that is important to me! I must move forward with this work. What else would I be doing?” One Emerging Sage describes her motivation as simply being part of her DNA: “How can I *not* do that?” Much like the Senior Sage leaders, many Emerging Sages talk about this seemingly inevitable and inexhaustible drive toward civic engagement. It’s in their genes!

Senior Sage Leaders

What about our older Sage leaders? What fuels their Generativity Four fire? There may be snow on the roof of these gray-haired seniors, but there is also fire in the hearth which warms their heart and energizes their generative engagements. While Emerging Sage leaders identify with all five motivations, most Senior Sages are chiefly motivated by altruism and self-interest—and a few by power. The altruism motivation focuses on three Generativity Four activities: community improvement, wanting to giving back, and helping others.

The motivation of wanting to *improve the quality of community life* is one of the greatest sources of generativity for Senior Sage leaders. This has to do with grabbing any important situation by the neck and providing specific leadership that is needed. They want to leave a legacy for their children and grandchildren, influence the various sectors of the community to work collaboratively, and fulfill long-held dreams during retirement years. Space and time are both being extended. The Senior Sages are living beyond self:

The best thing I ever did, besides marrying my wife, was having the opportunity to come here to live, raise a family, and somehow scratch out a living when we didn't have two nickels to rub together. I always felt this country was founded on the principal of people becoming involved in their community.

In a community you need the private, public, and nonprofits working together. Working to get all three sectors to do this inspires me, and I believe those of us who have the skills need to jump in and work together. I like meeting new people and learning from them. And I enjoy engaging them in something productive. I also have a strong desire to help others and get things accomplished in our community. When I retired young at 55, my goal was to provide time, talent, and treasure for our community.

Generative altruism also plays out in wanting to give back and help others. This happens in a variety of ways for Senior Sage leaders:

Shortly after we returned to Grass Valley, we were at a dinner party and an old friend said, “Well, now it's time for you to give back to the community.” I thought about this because I had not been back here very long; but he was absolutely right. This was a wonderful place

to come of age, and I valued this so many times—whether it was my teachers, the people I worked for, or others who gave me a boost. These experiences really shaped me.

My husband and I agreed it was time for us to give back because we have been very fortunate. We have enough to live on and have traveled many places around the globe. We started doing things like working on Habitat for Humanity sites and finding organizations that we believe in. I want to give back to children who are in pain in their childhood the way I was. Maybe that's why I am into helping to develop people, so they can become fulfilled and feel joy.

Senior Sages discuss the generative motivation of personal fulfillment in various ways:

The need is simply there. If it wasn't, we would have to invent it to meet our need for personal fulfillment. It has to do with propelling the quality of our community life, and I am privileged to want to give the balance of my life to this goal.

I'm a social person and I like to be involved. There's no way that in retirement I'd sit around and knit or read all the time. And I enjoy being appreciated. It's fun to be a big frog in a little puddle. People actually thank me for what we're doing in offering superb music, and I feel we're succeeding. It's very inspirational and keeps me going!

For other Senior Sages, it's something more innate or at least inculcated at an early age:

It's simple. I was raised that way. My father, a blue-collar worker with two years of high school, used to say, "When you make a living in your community, you give back in whatever way you can." So, this has been a family tradition that has been passed on. Also, having been in education, it is natural to think of service to my community in this way.

Certain things have to be done, and it's just something that I do. I don't really think about it, and I don't need to be told. If I see that something is needed, I do it.

It's just who I am, it's how I was raised. It's also a way to have a sense of belonging, of knowing it's my community. And it's a way to have a personal role. I'm a "2" in the Enneagram, a helper.

It is a joy for almost every Senior Sage leader to be involved in civic projects, and they especially value their association with colleagues. In most instances, Senior Sages first got to know others through their involvement in one or more community projects; this became their "admissions ticket" to Western Nevada County. Rather than hunkering down and stagnating in an isolated retirement community, they chose civic engagement and found they were welcomed by like-minded people. In short, this new community within a community became their social hub and network and fuel for their Generativity Four fire.

Most Senior Sage leaders suggest they are motivated by a desire to give back to their community because the community has already given something of value to them. In many cases, they were welcomed to Western Nevada County through the volunteer efforts of their neighbors. Now they want to be the neighbors who welcome other newcomers. Not a few Senior Sages have learned about volunteer work from participating in workshops that are sponsored by the Center for Nonprofit Leadership (CNL). Several Senior Sages now want to help plan these workshops and even lead some themselves.

There is a second sense of giving back. The Senior Sages often recognize they have acquired certain talents and experiences during their many years in corporations, governmental agencies, and nonprofit organizations. They believe what they have learned from these experiences should be shared with younger men and women—that not to do so would be a waste. However, this sense of payback is not enough. It doesn't really capture the essence of the motivational basis for civic engagement among Senior Sage leaders. If service to the community is seen only as payback, or as nothing more than obligation, then civic engagement is likely to be a half-hearted, short-lived affair.

The sense of obligation only goes so far, for there is something much more to Senior Sages when it comes to motivation. The fire must be burning bright with a warm and spiritual glow.

Volunteer community service has to “feed the spirit.” Even if they don’t initially know what it means to have their spirits fed, Senior Sages soon discover they are being nurtured by their civic service. And this suggests a different kind of generativity. Senior Sages are usually those who have worked for a living throughout their adult lives, so the question might be posed this way: “Why do they do this if they’re not being paid?” The answer is not that they “owe” someone this service, but that they come alive through civic engagement and find new meaning and purpose in their lives. These Senior Sage leaders *are* getting “paid” but with payment to their spirit rather than their bank account. And there is payment to their physical well-being as well. As we have already noted, research indicates that senior citizens tend to live longer when spirit, mind, and heart are all being fed. Our own Senior Sage leaders often confirm this conclusion:

The benefits I get from my civic involvements are personal fulfillment and self-actualization. But there is also the benefit that comes from generativity, the desire to want to leave something behind of lasting value. We have to connect with the young. They need us and we need them, and we have much to learn from one another. And there is another benefit: sound physical and mental health. Our civic involvement in the organizations we love helps to prolong our lives by keeping our minds sharp and by fighting off the anxiety and depression that often come with the awareness of pending death.

So, for most Senior Sages, giving back is much more than a sense of duty. It is contributing to social good because the personal rewards are so great. Senior Sages find rich fulfillment in the work they do and in the results that they can achieve—especially in collaboration with other members of their community. Many Senior Sages get involved in the arts and witness the great pleasure others take in attending a play or musical event. Many also see differences that they are making in the lives of women who are seeking shelter, or in helping children who are in need. These are tangible rewards that Senior Sages can readily observe and feel firsthand. In many cases, the Sages had a career in business and were motivated by that success. They now find it is fulfilling to succeed at something that benefits other people in their community. This becomes a “double-barreled” success.

Senior Sages are particularly motivated when this double-barreled success is associated with a sense of mission. If their favored nonprofit organization has a clear mission and vision of what is

needed and being sought, then success for Senior Sages is much sweeter and their energetic commitment to do more is that much greater. When the mission, for instance, concerns the welfare of children, passion is easily ignited. Senior Sages readily find personal fulfillment. There is nothing quite like saving the life of a child or helping a child toward a promising future. It is in seniors' work with children that we often find the most significant kind of generativity—a merging of two or even three modes of generativity.

Quiet Generativity and Lifelong Learning

Most Emerging and Senior Sage leaders want to leave a legacy—a footprint in the sand. As Kotre (1984) noted, they want to live beyond self. But they don't care if anyone knows this is their footprint. They are doing civic community work to feed their own spirit and to witness an impact that goes well beyond the gratification of their egos. There certainly is nothing wrong with getting a little credit for the work being done, but this is not their primary motivation. Often no one else in the community knows about the phenomenal amount of work being done by any Sage leader, but it is not important to them that they know. As reported earlier, one very senior woman who has played a major leadership role over many decades speaks of “giving quietly” and “leading quietly.” As she expresses it, “The good Lord knows, and that's enough.” This is true charity and the essence of Generativity Four.

There is also the meaning and satisfaction that comes from learning something new while engaged in civic leadership. This often is a quiet enterprise. It typically is only identified when a Generative Four leader is asked to reflect on their own deep caring. Apparently, as generative adults we continue to learn and find new challenges to be a source of insight rather than pure challenge and overwhelm. This is perhaps best conveyed through the words offered by Dan, one of our four *Featured Players*. As you might recall, Dan had served as president of a university and previously was a successful physicist. What is there still to learn, having lived the life of researchers and educator? Apparently, there is still much to learn:

Since working on the Sage Leadership Project, I have gotten a number of additional insights about community leadership and community engagement. I believe this project was more responsible for me being thoughtful about leadership and what it takes by struggling with my own answers to the interview questions. I became reflective about my own style of leadership

and was able to identify good and bad examples of leadership. So, the Sage Leadership Project was a powerful learning experience for me.

It was interesting and informative to learn just how many ways that people give back to our community. This expanded my view of what could be done. People who teach music, who help with educating the young, taught me that civic engagement is a huge community resource. The Sage project was a very inspiring experience for me. I drew energy from the interviews, and, like many of us, also resulted in making new friends. One of the lessons learned is that everyone has a story. And as well as I thought I knew a person, I really didn't until I engaged him in the kinds of questions that were asked in the interviews. The asking of questions links back to my earlier comments about parenting, about me being an advisor/counselor. Often that means honoring my mistakes and learning from them. Learning to ask open questions that cause a person to discover their own answers is a real skill. I truly believe that the questions we decided to ask enabled this to happen, and that was an important learning for me.

As we noted in a previous essay, the "big picture" is discovered by those engaged in Generativity Four. When one embarks upon a journey of civic engagement at any point in life, there appears to be a rich opportunity for new learning. As Dan has observed, it is only the matter of opening up to this opportunity:

To put a wrap on this as to what I have learned since retiring over 15 years ago, I have an appreciation for learning new things and experiencing and taking new risks with the unknown. I don't mean in just an intellectual way. I learned from my experiences in Habitat for Humanity how a house is constructed by just going out and working on it. This hands-on experience really got me away from my leadership role as a university president, and especially about ego. I just went out, got a hammer, and learned how to do it. It was ok to not know anything, to just be a novice. And you know, in a year, I could roof my own house, build a foundation, space rebar, etc. Then I got interested in woodworking....

What I have come to learn at this stage of my life is to honor what I don't know *and* have confidence that I can learn new things. I really got to appreciate the principles of Total Quality Management when I was re-building my Ford Model A. I decided that I would take down every single part and put them back together again from scratch. I really had no idea

how to do this, but I got a book. What I learned was always to think through what I was about to do, and never to rush. Be patient. Do it right the first time because if I do it wrong, I'm going to do it all over again. Some of that "do over" thing is a life-long lesson.....All of my projects that have required me to use my hands have really tested my brain....and my patience.

Dan has outlined quite a curriculum for himself. As a former educator, he has now built his own personal university with a broad selection of life courses--and the tuition is paid not with money but with a willingness to take a risk. Generativity becomes both quiet and brave.