

# The Big Picture, Civic Engagement and Generativity Four

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We are now ready to explore the fourth set of generative roles—those that relate to civic engagement. It was our study of Sage leadership in Western Nevada County, California, that led to an unanticipated and important finding about generativity and also served as the primary motivator for us to prepare this series of essays on deep caring (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012).

We found repeatedly that both Emerging and Senior Sage Leaders in Western Nevada County were energized by a form of generativity that didn't fit Erik Erikson's (1963) model of generativity; nor with the more recent model offered by George Vaillant (2012). Once we began to broaden our understanding of generativity, we came to realize that generativity might also extend "backwards" to the extraordinary energizing experience of raising a child or creating and sustaining a project. As a result of these reconsiderations, we arrived at a fourth role model that is presented in this essay. This form of generativity yields valuable insights for those who are engaged in coaching "for the greater good" (Freedman and Bergquist, 2021).

## An Expanded Generativity: Space

In setting the stage for the fourth and final set of generativity roles, we begin by briefly reviewing the first three sets of roles: Level One Generativity primarily involves the raising of children and is usually associated with motives to provide for their care during our early adulthood; a variant on this parenting role is the creation and maintenance of a treasured project. Level Two Generativity, which is the principal focus of work done by Erikson, is concerned with the deep caring motivations that are manifest during mid-life—teaching others, mentoring, witnessing the growth of a colleague. Level Three Generativity seems to be about guardianship (as George Vaillant notes) and the preservation of existing or historical values, land, and legacy. This third set of generativity roles concern the extension in time; that is, bringing the past into the present and ensuring that this past is sustained into the future. We are generative guardians of the past as it is sustained in the present and future.

Generativity Four is about another form of extension. It is about extension in space rather than in time. While Generativity One is about deep caring for someone or something that is close to us (in space and in our heart), and Generativity Two is about extending this space and heart to other people in our organizations (through mentoring, motivating, etc.) and into the future (through ensuring that there is a legacy), Generativity Four is about extending the space into a broader community and ensuring that a legacy is expanded, embedded, and preserved in this community. Stated simply, Generativity Four is about doing something much larger than Generativity One, Two, and Three. And it's about doing something more than preserving the past and preparing for our own deaths as older adults. Rather it has to do with building something new for the future by advancing civic welfare in own community.

This extension in space beyond our own death is an important concept because it leads us to a final exploration of the interplay between generativity and both spirit and soul (a topic to which we turn in the final essay in this series). This type of extension is captured in the title of John Kotre's *Outliving our Selves*

(Kotre,1984) . It also builds on the fundamental concept of generativity offered by Erik Erikson, who proposed that the primary developmental task during the final years of our lives is to seek ego integrity and not fall victim to existential despair. Erikson thought that by the time we reach 60 years of age, we begin preparing for our own death. Now, increased life-expectancy is giving the average senior 15, 20, or even 30 more years to choose between vibrant engagement or stagnation and decline. As a professional coach, we might find work with clients who are far past the traditional retirement age.

Yes, there are people who withdraw and lead a life of despair; Erikson’s challenge is an accurate description of the unfortunate men and women who choose to retreat behind gates and closed doors. For whatever reason, such people seek to disengage or are forced to disengage. Maybe it is burn-out, lack of energy, or illness. Perhaps it is insufficient finances or the absence of a caring family. And for some seniors who have made this choice, the end of generativity may have come earlier in life.

## **Civic Engagement**

We have found that the 50 Senior Sage leaders (ages 56 and older) in our Western Nevada County, California, project are too busy to fall into despair or worry about pending death. They are fully engaged in leading social reform and other forms of community service. They have made the choice—usually conscious—that “Withdrawal is not for me!” They aren’t going to stop now—at this point in their lives. And in so doing, they have helped to identify the fourth set of generativity roles for which the citizens of Nevada City and other communities should be grateful.

There is an additional something for which the Senior Sage leaders are themselves grateful. We know from the literature (and particularly in a series of ongoing studies conducted by the MacArthur Foundation) that we stay vibrant in old age if we remain socially, intellectually, and physically active. And when we do, we live longer. Professional coaches should take note of this important finding—especially if they are involved in health-based coaching (Bergquist, Carrier and Cary, 2019; Teurman and Bergquist, 2019).

At some level we all know (and the Senior Sage Leaders particularly know) an important truth: “if we don’t use it, we’re going to lose it.” So, it is reasonable to conclude that civic engagement and the fourth level of generativity can be based on a wonderfully selfish motive—a recognition that we need to be civically engaged if we want to stay vital and remain alive! A professional coach can articulate this conclusion when working with their mid-centurion clients.

As we are about to demonstrate, however, our Sage leaders taught us much more about Generativity Four than just a strategy for living longer; this was especially the case with our Emerging Sage leaders (ages 26-55), who are likely to live many more years and are not yet pondering their own mortality. In our exploration of this complex matrix of motivations, we begin by reviewing the different ways that Generativity Four is enacted. As is the case with Generativity Three, there are a wide variety of narratives conveyed and stories to be told about Generativity Four—and once again professional coaches should take note of these diverse narratives.

In this section, we explore the motivations that energize Generative Four acts, while also considering the trade-offs in terms of sacrifices being made by the Generative Four actors and the option to turn away from Generative Four and remain disengaged from civic action. We rely heavily on the interviews we conducted with Emerging and Senior Sage leaders, as well as the more extended interviews we had with our four *Featured Actors*. We now turn to the many ways in which Generativity Four plays out in civic life.

We found through our 100 Sage leader interviews that most of our leaders had one "pet" project, although many are involved in other activities as well. We also found there were significant differences in the challenges faced by our Emerging and Senior Sage leaders with regard to how they manage their civic engagements.

### **Emerging Sage Leaders**

Unlike the Senior Sage leaders, most Emerging Sages are still working full-time and have major family responsibilities. Their generative civic engagements take place, at least in part, through their formal job in government or in nonprofit human service agencies. There is much more to the story, however, when it comes to the involvements of these Emerging Sages in the community life of Grass Valley and Nevada City. They often are engaged in volunteer activities above and beyond their job—ranging from equine rescue to Rotary to Nevada County Arts. In most cases, the Emerging Sage leaders are involved in at least three different community-based organizations—and only one of these is a formal paid position. What these relatively young men and women have in common is their exceptional level of energy and their sustained commitment to all of the civic activities in which they are engaged. They truly exemplify Generativity Four.

*Passion and Commitment:* What drives these busy men and women to do all this community service work? This question is often appropriate to ask when coaching a relatively young client with multiple commitments. One great passion shared by many of the Emerging Sages is the natural environment. Even more than Senior Sage leaders, the Emerging Sages believe that preservation and restoration of the beautiful physical environment is critical to community life. In this way, they bridge Generativity Three and Generativity Four. The Emerging Sage leaders also consistently exhibit a passion for formal civic leadership; they have run for public office and serve on community boards, and they express interest in the outcomes of government and also its structures and operations. Unlike many of the Senior Sage leaders, these young men and women believe that something of value can be achieved through public office and effective public policy. They devote themselves not just to nonprofit initiatives but also to public ventures.

*A Supportive Environment:* In most cases, the typical Emerging Sage leader has a supportive spouse who fully appreciates the community work the leader is doing—and may even be involved in comparable civic activities themselves. For many of the Emerging female Sages, there is a “significant other” in their lives who at least some of the time is the primary family caregiver. Children are additional sources of support and encouragement, especially when they enter adolescence. This finding suggests that it might be appropriate at times to engage in coaching with a couple rather than just one of the partners. *Couples Coaching* particularly makes sense if there are issues regarding work/life balance (or work-service-life balance) for one or both members of the couple. Is family-based coaching out of the question?

Support also comes from outside the immediate family. As one of the Emerging leaders notes, those with whom one works on civic projects also become a primary social network. And members of their families often join the Emerging Sages and become part of this expanded social system. Much like the barn-raising of a previous era, contemporary community services become occasions for family-based friendships and celebrations. Emerging Sage leaders have many balls in the air, but they are joined by other jugglers and soon find that this becomes a splendid inter-family affair.

*Sacrifice and Legacy:* There is, of course, the other side of the story. It’s not all fun-and-games for many of the Emerging Sage leaders. As a professional coach, we are often helping our client address these challenging issues. The Emerging Sage leaders we interviewed talked about missing out on important family events because of their civic activities and obligations. Once again, we might ask if family-based coaching is

out of the question. The young leader comes home exhausted from a full day of service to their community. They find little time and energy left for those about whom they most care – their spouse and children. One emerging leader talks about falling asleep on the couch rather than playing basketball with his daughter as promised.

Yet, the commitment to outside service is compelling to these Emerging Sages even when they have children living at home. They believe that a strong community makes for strong children. From their perspective, it truly does take a village to raise a child. A community that works to counter decline will be better suited to raise healthy and caring children. A professional coach can align themselves with this perspective by offering their services at low cost or pro bono “on behalf of the greater good.”

Even when sacrifices are being made by Emerging Sages, there are benefits for the entire family. One Emerging Sage leader shares the experience of taking his daughter with him when meeting with a young man for whom he is a “big brother.” Later the daughter says, “Daddy, we have to help him.” What a remarkable life lesson! Is there a better way in which to learn about giving back than by observing one’s parent in action? As many of the Emerging Sage leaders observe, these powerful examples of human service tend to linger in the minds and hearts of children. Perhaps this daughter will herself become actively involved in community service and will one day become an Emerging and then a Senior Sage leader. What a powerful legacy this would be! A family-based coach could build on this potential legacy.

### **Senior Sage Leaders**

Unlike their Emerging Sage counterparts, most Senior Sage leaders are either fully or partly retired, so their favored civic organizations are largely outside the workplace. They tend to be in nonprofit organizations, fraternal and service clubs, and/or business and religious organizations. Professional coaches can still be of value to these leaders—though their coaching fees will usually be set at a much lower level.

Civic engagement in organizations that serve youth are particularly compelling and gratifying for many Senior Sage leaders. Often, they do this for their own children who are now parents, and that bridge across three generations is critical for the community’s vitality because it keeps Grass Valley and Nevada City from “becoming an old folk’s community” – or what Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) call “lifestyle enclaves” that can derail our American democratic experience.

Most communities have service and philanthropic organizations like Rotary, Kiwanis and United Way. More recently we find the emergence of service organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Nature Conservancy. Most communities also have distinctive nonprofit organizations—ranging from bicycle riding on behalf of cancer relief to carnivals to raise money for the relief of poverty. Grass Valley and Nevada City have multiple charitable outlets, such as Music in the Mountains and the Center for the Arts. Both communities have historical main streets and restored Gold Rush-era buildings, leading Grass Valley to host Thursday Night Market and Nevada City to support a Victorian Christmas every year.

These two communities are blessed to have a third type of organization: The Center for Nonprofit Leadership (CNL). CNL sponsors nonprofit leadership seminars and offers best practice workshops and forums that help to strengthen and advance 66 nonprofit member organizations that take advantage of its services. This third, meta-level type of organization is rarely found in most communities. We believe it is critical to fostering and promoting senior-level sage engagement—especially if complemented by professional coaching services.

*Diversity and Nimbleness of Heart:* Most Senior Sages are able to identify a litany of nonprofit organizations in which they are actively engaged; on average, each is involved in at least three, ranging from political action groups to arts organizations and from work with youth to work with the elderly. Senior Sage leaders are also involved in multiple sectors of community life. Lessons learned in one (e.g., the arts) are applied to a second (e.g., the environment) and to a third (e.g., politics), and the networks established with one are engaged on behalf of the others.

In many instances, the unifying factor is the interest that Senior Sage leaders have in the complex workings of Grass Valley and Nevada City. As they begin to understand the various community sectors, they come to fully appreciate the interwoven relationships that exist; and when this happens, they see the need to become involved in more than one sector. The hearts of Senior Sages are diverse, and they are nimble in their movement across boundaries as they acquire knowledge and experience in many areas. They are even more agile in their capacity to simultaneously keep many balls in the air and—perhaps most telling—deft in their capacity and willingness to engage various leadership styles and strategies in different organizations.

This passion of Senior Sages to extend beyond one sector and engage in a widely diverse set of initiatives is very impressive, especially given that these men and women are often retired and supposedly past their most productive and energetic years! Professional coaches can help their senior clients fully appreciate what they are doing and even learn about the balancing of life priorities from these remarkable women and men—the roles might even shift as a coach becomes the learner and their client the teacher!

The one lingering issue with Senior Sages' passions and diversity of involvements is that many of the same people often can be found in different organizations, making it sometimes difficult for “new folks” to break in. This is one area where a coach can serve as a goad and challenger: encouraging their clients to be aware of ways in which they might be “dominating” their community by serving themselves on too many communities and heading too many projects. There is no room for the “newcomers” to the community or at least to the provision of services in their community.

*“Island” Communities:* Grass Valley and Nevada City are particularly noted for the richness and diversity of the arts. Given the extraordinary number and range of theatrical and musical events, museums, galleries, and arts fairs, these two communities are fast becoming “arts destinations of distinction.” Some of these offerings are well-known and widely publicized. Others are less widely known, yet still are of exceptional quality. These arts offerings are effectively coordinated through Nevada County Arts, and it is fascinating to see how much the community gets done when compared with other rural areas in California.

And there may be a secret to this success. The flourishing of the arts may be tied to the unique dynamics that are often found in “island” communities; that is, in communities which are at least partially isolated from major urban arts competition. On an island, you learn to do it yourself rather than traveling miles to attend a theater or gallery that is run and operated by professionals who are “in the arts business” full-time. One Senior Sage notes that Nevada County is a powerful “starter” county.

We have found this proliferation of the arts (and many other community services) in other “island communities” with which we have been affiliated. One of us, for instance, has consulted with governmental and nongovernmental organizations in Whitehorse (a Canadian community located in the Yukon Territory). This remote community is home to a substantial number of artistic organizations that provide high quality performances and products. Whitehorse, like Grass Valley and Nevada City is a “do it yourself” “self-entertaining” community.

As in a 1930s Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland movie, a small group of people can just “start-up” in a local barn or an abandoned office building, small manufacturing plant, or vacant Main Street store. This starter mentality and dynamics may have something to do with community size. During the final project seminar of our Emerging and Senior Sage leader interviewers, it was widely acknowledged that Nevada County is “not so large that you can’t get things done, and not so small that you can’t get things done.” “Small is big,” and even a slight bit of isolation seems to generate a significant level of arts activity. This is undoubtedly true of other areas of community life. What a wonderful setting in which to provide professional coaching.

Many Senior Sage leaders are engaged in some form of governance, such as the chambers of commerce or nonprofit boards. In most instances, their involvements seem to be driven by a commitment to environmental, fiscal, or cultural sustainability. Senior Sage leaders are not so much interested in controlling their community as they are in expanding effective discourse; for example, how to get more disadvantaged people involved in community governance, how to nourish cultural life, how to create conditions for new businesses to flourish and strengthen the economy. While the term “island” doesn’t get used or discussed very often, the Senior Sage leaders of Grass Valley and Nevada City recognize that they live in “an island” community. And as with all such communities, the islanders have to do most everything themselves without much help coming from the outside.

*Social Welfare:* Western Nevada County has a large number of nonprofit social welfare agencies—ranging from Habitat for Humanity to Women of Worth, from agencies that address the needs of babies to food co-ops, from service to people with drug habits to those who are homeless and those who have been abused. These agencies depend on the volunteer work done by Senior Sage leaders and others in the community who “give from their heart,” expecting and receiving no financial compensation. Professional coaching “on behalf of the greater good” thrives in such a setting.

Some of this “heart” results from the unique relationship that exists between the county volunteer organizations and the government agencies that serve these communities—particularly the Nevada County Health and Human Service Agency. The former director had a unique philosophy about the role his agency should play in the community: he believed that nonprofit organizations should provide as many community services as they possibly can, and that county government’s job is to make this happen as often as is practicable. This has not always been the way of Nevada County government; as is the case with so many county, state, and federal agencies, there was a long-held and pervasive view that government agencies should assume sole or at least primary responsibility for human services.

Of course, there is more to the story than just collaborative relationships between the community’s government and nonprofit sectors. In many ways, as we noted previously, the culture of Grass Valley and Nevada City contributes to what Alexis de Tocqueville (and later Robert Bellah and his colleagues) called “habits of the heart” (de Tocqueville, 2000/1835; Bellah et al, 1985) This is particularly the case among its Senior Sage leaders. As Hillary Clinton (2006) wrote about children needing to be raised by a village, perhaps seniors are most able to find a calling when they live in communities that have both heart and place value on the lives of everyone there.

Many Senior Sage leaders came to Western Nevada County from other communities in California or other regions of the United States. To a person they note how remarkable it is that Grass Valley and Nevada City are able to respond rapidly to individuals and families who are in crisis—and how flexible and often entrepreneurial nonprofit organizations can be in making this happen.

For instance, when senior volunteers at Habit for Humanity temporarily run out of home building projects, they often contact nonprofit organizations to see if they can help. The commitment, responsiveness, and organizational ability among these senior leaders are particularly poignant, given that many of them don't have the deep roots of continuity often found there.

## **Generative Roles and Responsibilities**

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. We suggest once again that professional coaches take note of these generative four roles. Furthermore, we urge professional coaches to help their clients identify and fully appreciate the distinctive knowledge and skills that they have acquired in their work and nonwork life.

In an interview with our coaching colleague, Bill Carrier, and one of his clients (Alex Petroff), we find that he is in the business of helping his clients discover their special skills. As noted by his client, Alex Petroff, Bill Carrier is also in the business of helping his clients reframe the way they approach their community service activities and their request for financial and nonfinancial support from other members of their community (Carrier and Petroff, 2020).

### **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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*Financial Development:* The fourth way that Emerging Sage leaders are helping their favored civic organizations is through finance development and fundraising 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.

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.

*Thoughtful listening:* 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. There is much to be learned from this Emerging Sage leader that a professional coach might take into their work with young clients.

Our wise Emerging Sage leader is not alone in offering the wise counsel of listening. Other 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. More wisdom to be incorporated in the work being done by professional coaches.



*Mentoring:* 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 in which 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 (e.g. Boice, 1992). 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. These insightful findings can be offered by professional coaches to their own work with clients who are considering or are now engaged in mentoring. 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. There are rich opportunities for transformative coaching at this intersection between mentoring and leadership.

### **Senior Sage Leaders**

The 50 Senior Sage leaders say they are most likely to help their favored civic organizations in five key ways. Like their Emerging Sage colleagues, they provide leadership and specialized expertise. They also facilitate teamwork, enhance communication, and provide financial treasure. Professional coaches can, in turn, be of value to their senior clients by not only helping them identify a key role that they might play in their community but also helping them acknowledge that they are “not too old” or too much settled into retirement to expand their generative outreach to local community projects.

*Personal Leadership:* As in the case of Emerging leaders, 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.

*Specialized Expertise:* The second most common way that Senior Sage leaders help their favored organizations is by offering specialized expertise. In this regard, they consider themselves to be similar to the Emergent leaders. Th expertise, however, often differs from that offered by their junior counterparts. Sometimes the expertise 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.

This provision of specialized expertise is extensively engaged by the “content specialists” who offer their valuable services pro bono through the SCORE organization that operates throughout the United States. Those providing these services report savoring many generativity benefits—finding gratification when assisting someone with preparation of their business plans or experiencing a moment of joy when one of their clients is featured in a local business magazine. Generativity Four blends with Generativity Two and Three to make SCORE mentoring beneficial to both the mentor and their client.

*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.

*Financial Development:* Nonprofit organizations are always in search of money to carry out their special missions. Senior Sage leaders can be particularly helpful in this regard (often even more so than the Emerging leaders). 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.

Sometimes with the assistance of a professional coach, many Senior Sage leaders muse about the ways they are most helpful at the strategic level of their favored organizations. They exemplify the push in Generativity Four toward expanding the space in which they deeply care.

### **Extending the Space: Increased Diversity and the Bigger Picture**

This expanding of space comes in two important forms: (1) increased diversity of civic engagements and (2) movement to a broader perspective regarding how to impact one's community. An important role can be played in both regards by what we might identify as an *Expansionist Coach*.

#### **Increasing Diversity of Perspective**

We have found that most of the Generative Four leaders we interviewed start civic engagement by first working with one or two organizations. They are then likely to get involved in an increasingly diverse set of activities and organizations. This diversification is poignantly portrayed in the narrative on civic engagement offered by Sally, our *Featured Player* who was once honored as "citizen of the year" in Los Angeles and is now ever-expanding her role as a civic leader in Nevada County:

Generativity Four leaders not only tend to expand their activities once involved with civic activities; they also believe they do their best work when addressing the "big picture." They are able to sit back and link global

perspectives to specific concerns of persons with whom they are working. For instance, Sage leaders often sit on nonprofit boards, and as board members they help to identify the rich resources and diverse perspectives that each board member brings to the table. They also help their board to formulate a unified strategic plan, and that usually draws on their entire life experience in working on behalf of a whole range of organizations.

At an even more expanded level, we see Generativity Four operating among those members of the Western Nevada County community who are involved not only in their own civic engagement, but also in the encouragement and preparation of other women and men for active engagement in their community. Each of our four *Featured Players* has been involved in not only the Sage Leadership Project but also in the Center for Nonprofit Leadership (CNL), which was the sponsoring agency for the Sage project and has played a major role in promoting and guiding civic leadership in Nevada County. We turn to the narrative offered by Dale, the retired telecommunication executive who is one of the co-founders of CNL:

Most of my mentoring here in Nevada County has been in helping to found and guide the Center for Nonprofit Leadership during its formative years. Because of my background in corporate leadership, and later as coach and consultant to nonprofit organizations, I had a level of knowledge and expertise that most other co-founders did not possess. I shared what I knew by serving as chair of the executive leadership committee for two years, then chaired and for many years served on the curriculum committee as well. I also planned and led numerous workshops during the past decade and was responsible for leading three, six-month leadership seminars.

Dale certainly has conceived of his Generativity Four role as one of expanding the picture of civic engagement. Much as Generativity One organizational founders and leaders often expand into Generativity Two time and space by helping to prepare other men and women as mentors and motivators for organizational leadership roles, so Dale is expanding Generativity Four time and space by preparing men and women for civic engagement. He is mentoring his Generativity Four colleagues, but this mentoring seems to be much "bigger" than is the case with the Generativity Two role played within specific organizations.

### **Thinking Globally, Acting Locally**

What is this bigger picture all about? We know from adult development literature that mature adults tend to resist narrow focus after they reach their 50s and 60s. They become systemic in their world view and seek to understand how everything connects, rather than emphasizing gaps in ideas, problems, and perspectives. We are once again reminded of the career of Peter Seeger, who helped coin the phrase "Think globally but act locally" – a guiding mantra for many community activists.

Seeger's perspective is appealing to many Senior Sage leaders as well because he suggests we must be interdisciplinary when tackling a local problem: We have to simultaneously consider economic, environmental, political, sociological, historical, and cultural issues when plotting a local initiative. And we must think beyond the confines of our own community. This seems to describe the mind-set and motivations of Dale. He operates "on behalf of the greater good." This is the primary source of satisfaction he finds in his Generativity Four work. Building on this assessment of Dale's motivation, we turn specifically to the issues of satisfaction and motivation to be found among other Sage leaders we interviewed.

## **The Meaning and Satisfaction of Civic Engagement**

As we have done with the first three generativity roles, we now explore the compelling reasons and rewards for Generativity Four. As in the case of the other modes of generativity, insights regarding the reasons and rewards of Generativity Four can be of great value to professional coaches. We approach these reasons from two perspectives. We begin with the return of one of our four *Featured Players*, Lisa, the woman who faced the Generative One challenge of raising a developmentally 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 lifetime 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. Everyone 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" 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. This is an important insight for

professional coaches to take into their sessions with a client beginning to start or expand their engagement in community services.

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.

*Achievement:* The primary Generativity Four satisfaction found among the Emerging Sages we interviewed comes from participating in activities that lead to the achievement of important 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.

*Assistance:* 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.

*Improvement:* Seeing the results of *community improvement* is especially meaningful to many Emerging Sages. This ranges from the "greater 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. Sustained satisfaction is derived from creativity and passion in making their "island" 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.

*Collaboration:* 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.

*Growth:* Generativity Four can include personal and professional growth—especially for mid-career men and women who are benefiting from work with a professional coach. Many 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. A professional coach can uniquely serve their clients by focusing on the learning that takes place. This coach can also encourage their client to learn about their own capacity to learning: “apparently I am not too old to learn something new!”

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 Emergent Sage 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. These are remarkable lessons to be learned that can help guide a leader through many future ventures.

*Tangible Results:* 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).

*Achievements:* 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. Senior Sage leaders love to assist with and witness the operation of successful special events.

As we noted with regard to SCORE mentorships, the Senior leaders we interviewed find satisfaction in helping someone create a new business and then find an adequate location for its operation. Success comes through helping members of their community achieve significant artistic goals. They enjoy witnessing audience appreciation. Senior sage leaders like to fill downtown retail spaces, shift the governing board from being an advisory agency to a corporate entity. They find gratification in weathering a host of problems, and making a successful turn-around: And love telling stories about these achievements.

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.

*Assisting:* 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.

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.

*Improvements:* 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.

*Collaboration:* 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.

*Appreciation:* 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.

It is often the blending of generativity and appreciation that yields success. A professional coach can often assist with this blending.

### **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. It is an important role that can be played by a *Discernment Coach* who helps their client sort out what is a "difference that makes a difference" from a "difference" that yields temporary results. The small differences and small successes often are lasting and set the stage (enablement) for even bigger successes.

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.

## The Motivations of Generativity Four

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 and in the agenda of a professional coach working with clients in mid-life..

### 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.

*Money vs. Generativity:* 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 in order to take on 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.

*Growth and Contribution:* 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, and 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.

*Vision of the Future:* 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 can 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. Professional coaches should keep this in mind when working with older clients. 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, in turn, focuses on three Generativity Four activities: community improvement, wanting to giving back, and helping others.

*Community Life:* 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:* Intangible motives also play 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.

*Involvement:* It is a joy for almost every Senior Sage leader to be involved in civic projects. 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.

*Giving Back:* 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 pay-back, 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 must “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?”

*Coming Alive:* 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. This can be a key point in coaching conversations with an older client. The 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—that a professional coach can emphasize in their coaching sessions with a client in their senior years.

*Mission and Meaning:* 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—and 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**

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. It is important for a professional coach to remember this—they should take off their hat as business coach sometimes and put on their hat as *Gratification Coach*.

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.

One of us has seen this same quiet generativity in full non-display on the part of a generous woman in Maine who makes great contributions to her local community, yet insists that these contributions remain unacknowledged. She has bought and fully supported a high-quality restaurant in her community, bought and supported a farm that provides fresh products to the local community, and contributed extensively to many community charities. Yet, little of this is known those living in the community. It is only through the hesitant revelation of one of her close friends that we are aware of these contributions. Once again, quiet generativity is in full operation.

### **Lifelong Learning**

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—often during a coaching session. Apparently, as generative adults we continue to learn and find new challenges to be a source of insight rather than pure challenge and overwhelm. The coaching sessions can themselves be important sources of new learning.

This commitment to lifelong learning is 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.

When we are stagnant the world in which we live tends to close up around us. When we are generative, the world in which we live keeps inviting us to learn new things. Coaching sessions can be one element in this welcoming world.

### **“Big Picture”**

The "big picture" is discovered by those engaged in Generativity Four—and a professional coach can serve as an *Expansion Coach* on behalf of this fourth mode of generativity. 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 series of essays. 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.

## **Balance Sheet I: Sacrifices of Civic Engagement**

We conclude our exploration of Generativity Four by looking at the balance sheet of the sacrifices and benefits of civic engagement, as well as one likely result of non-involvement: *stagnation*. We already have addressed the issues of motivation and satisfaction. However, the tangible benefits which one receives from Generativity Four activities are not the same as motivations; they are closely linked but possess a different quality; motivation being more internal and benefits being more external.



Furthermore, we believe that a key for coaching clients (and for those who are coaching them) is a full appreciation for the difficult choices being made between generativity and stagnation. These choices partially reside in the perceived presence or absence of benefits and sacrifice. Some people conclude that the benefits of civic engagement outweigh sacrifices, while others say that sacrifices outweigh benefits; still others see the lack of civic involvement as a potential sign of inertia. We rely once again primarily on the insights extracted from our interviews with 100 Sage leaders in Western Nevada County, California.

The subject of civic engagement begs the question of whether the involvements of Sage leaders come at high cost, and whether such sacrifices are offset by the personal benefits they receive. It is in this domain that we anticipated the greatest differences between Emerging and Senior Sage leaders. Of the 50 Senior Sages who were interviewed, 49 say there is virtually no sacrifice involved, that their civic work is enriching their lives. While the older leaders in most cases are now retired, or at least have fewer family constraints, the 50 younger Emerging Sages are typically in the midst of career demands and family obligations. This suggests that two questions need to be asked: How do they not see that civic engagement is yet another pull on their time, talent, and energy? How do they not see this voluntary work as a sacrifice?

### **Emerging Sage Leaders**

The Emerging Sage leaders are evenly divided between those who believe that civic engagement definitely involves personal sacrifice and those who believe it does not. And there are some who hold mixed views.

*Sacrifice? Yes and No:* Emerging Sages who believe their civic engagement has been at great personal sacrifice offer three principal reasons: time away from family, impact on health, and harm to domestic bliss:

I feel I sacrifice the time I have with my two young children. A day does not go by when I don't feel guilty about the hours I spend at work and on civic activities. I involve my kids whenever there is an opportunity, and they are often the youngest participants at a community event. I also make great effort to be present when I am at home and to work after they go to bed.

One of our Emerging leaders even attributed separation from his wife in part to his civic engagements:

Honestly, because I am so passionate about my work, it is really easy to allow myself to become wholly consumed by it. This hasn't been good for my personal life. Recently, I separated from my partner of eighteen years, and my consuming passion for my work definitely was one of the factors. I did not have a healthy work-life balance, and that clearly impacted my personal relationship.

About an equal number of Emerging Sage leaders say their civic involvements *do not* require personal sacrifice, and they offer three reasons: personal fulfillment, family involvement, obligation:

I don't feel there is sacrifice because I choose to put my energy into things that I'm really passionate about. I don't get involved out of a sense of "should" because I realize that those things don't give me energy.

It certainly helps to have a spouse who is similarly oriented:

I'm fortunate to have a wife who is actively involved. We enjoy doing these things together.

This is a life I have chosen and feel I have been called to. So I don't see my civic involvement as something outside of my life. It permeates everything I think about and do. There is no disconnect between it and my teaching, coaching, family, and the property we live on. It is all connected and is the best it can be.

And there are those Emerging Sages who feel *mixed* about the sacrifices they make in their civic involvements: “I sacrifice my time, but I would not do anything differently. Sometimes my involvement in the community leads to recurrent 12-hour days. It can be exhausting, but it is worth it!”

*The Differentiators:* Several clear factors have led some Emerging Sage leaders to view their generative civic engagements as more of a sacrifice than is the case with others. Among those having children, there is a strong sense that civic engagement means sacrificing home time, while those who either have no children or no longer have children living at home, the answer is very similar to Senior Sage leaders: sacrifice is minimal. One Emerging Sage even says that she and her husband were not going to have a second child in order to sustain their civic engagement. Clearly, it is hard to nurture a child (Stage One Generativity) while also trying to nurture a community (Stage Four Generativity).

A second differentiator is age. While not many of the Emerging Sages are in their late 20s or early 30s, those who are face unique challenges. Some of the younger Emerging Sages talk about feeling alienated from their peer group, that while they have paid work and are also contributing to several nonprofit organizations, their friends are “enjoying life.” These Emerging Sages don’t have time to be self-indulgent; they find it difficult to meet others of their own age with the same kind of passionate commitment to some specific community issue. And they don’t easily find friends, so feelings of isolation and being under-appreciated abound.

As we noted previously, life can be difficult for people who are out-of-sync with society’s expectations (Neugarten,1996) Our young Emerging Sage leaders have “grown-up” too fast and are assuming the burdens of mature adulthood without going through what Erik Erikson calls the “moratorium”—a stage for safe exploration of alternative identifies, values, and lifestyles.

There is a third differentiator. For some of the Emerging Sages civic engagement is closely tied to their workplace. For others, civic engagement is essentially unrelated to the work they do for a living. It’s a bit easier for the first group, although virtually all of the Emerging Sages report the need to set boundaries and avoid taking on too much—regardless of the alignment between their paid and unpaid work.

*Managing Boundaries:* It should be noted that even though sacrifice is clearly present, Emerging Sages speculate about the generative rejuvenation that comes through their civic engagements. Even when volunteer work is closely related to work being done for pay, there is something about it that brings new energy to the paid work and provides a level of gratification that a formal “job” rarely does. We found this to also be the case for many young volunteers working with SCORE. Though they might be spending most of the time being paid for their work as accountant, marketer or strategic planner, they are giving these services away “free” through SCORE. There is something “special” about offering this to start up businesses or to immigrants seeking assistance from SCORE. Generativity Four is being engaged. However, this doesn’t mean that everything runs smoothly for the Sage leaders or SCORE volunteers. Conflict often emerges regarding work/service/life balance Choices need to be made between family, career, and civic engagement. A considerable amount of tension and struggle is still present and expressed by many of the Emerging Sage leaders and those SCORE volunteers who are not yet retired.

Even when a good balance is struck for a brief period, something usually happens. Everything goes off-kilter again. As one Emerging Sage leader observes, “It’s very easy to get all-consumed in volunteer work, given my passion for it and the outcomes it yields.” And this is a person who doesn’t have children and doesn’t have to balance volunteer work with family time! Another Emerging Sage, an elected official, says the

sacrifice to his private life is an unresolved trade-off against the gratification he receives from his public service.

The loss of private life is particularly apparent in small “island” communities like Grass Valley and Nevada City. In large part, this tension centers on the management of boundaries: “How do I say ‘no’ when I’m overwhelmed, or when I clearly haven’t devoted enough time to my family, job, or even my private life?” “What about the boundaries that separate my paid from my voluntary work, and when does one bleed into the other?” “How do I find time to really connect with other people?” “How do I set boundaries when I am always available by email or cell phone?” “In the age of texting and twittering, how do I find time to be off the grid?” “How do I find quality time with my partner, my children, and my friends? We no longer leave work at 5 pm, and we no longer devote our evenings to family life.” “When is *my* down time?” The Emerging Sage leaders find that setting clear and consistent boundaries is very challenging and often elusive—especially in the age of electronic technology. It is always a tenuous balance! Personal life, work life, and civic engagement all seem to flow into one another, and what was once seen as definitive boundaries blur and merge. A professional coach enters to help their challenged client set appropriate boundaries and sustain a fulfilling balance among competing priorities.

Boundary management is not about giving-up time or relationships. And it is not about money, lost opportunities, or better pay in the private sector. As one Emerging Sage notes, “Once you raise your hand in this community, you are going to get sucked into many activities. You are going to get pulled into things that you did not necessarily anticipate.” Many of the Emerging Sages are involved in civic engagements that focus on sustaining the natural environment. Ironically, they recognize they need to manage boundaries in their own lives if they are going to sustain boundaries that affect their civic commitments. In the end, sustainability becomes a goal at many levels.

*From Success to Significance:* The challenge of managing boundaries seems to be based in part on a change in the priorities set by Emerging Sages as they move into the second half of their lives. Their commitment to family might remain strong when they reach mid-age, but there is also a shift in the concern they have about the nature and quality of work they are doing. We know from considerable research on adult development that many young adults are ambitious and tend to identify self-worth in terms of personal and professional success: being singled out for recognition, getting a pay raise or promotion, being elected to public office, or appointed to a prestigious committee. As these men and women mature, a gradual but sometimes dramatic change occurs. They begin to focus not on their personal and professional success but on achieving something that is significant outside themselves. This is about leaving a legacy, about being “good for the world” rather than just being “good in the world.” (Jones, 2020) It is about Generativity Four.

We also know something about what aides and what hinders this shift from personal and professional success to a higher level of significance. A key is the support of important others in one’s life: If the partner doesn’t understand or encourage this shift to significance, then potential Emerging Sages are likely to pull back and remain engaged in the pursuit of personal success. And in the process, they are likely to risk becoming stagnant rather than generative. A couple that we know works as a coaching team with a leader and their spouse. This coaching couple finds that the spouse is often key to the success (and sustained generativity) of their leader partner.

It often goes beyond just the person with whom one has an intimate relationship. If friends, co-workers, and neighbors don’t appreciate the new priorities of Emerging Sages, and tell them they are losing their competitive edge, they are likely to fall back into old patterns—begrudging the success of others. Our study

of Sage leadership suggests that it truly does take a community to help Sage leaders find new purpose and energy in their lives, and to help them transition from focusing on success and self-achievement to significance—probably the single factor that most leads to an enduring legacy. It might also take a professional coach to help a client find the new purpose and energy associated with being significant rather than just successful.

There is one other matter that we need to reiterate: it is the management of boundaries. Our findings from the Sage project suggests that the management of boundaries may be critical in moving from success to significance. If Emerging Sages don't devote time, attention, and energy to significant others in their lives, how can they expect their partners to support their shift to significance—and the often-accompanying de-emphasis on pay and promotion? If other members of the Emerging Sage's family don't really understand the importance of the leader's civic engagement, how can they be expected to willingly sacrifice their time with the leader or forgo their own priorities—like owning a home, having a second child, traveling, or saving for retirement?

More than one Emerging Sage observes with regret that he gave up so much earlier in his adult life that he now feels he can't adequately provide for his family. If Emerging Sage leaders don't pay enough attention to sustaining their own physical and mental health, they won't be able to sustain a commitment to significance beyond personal ambition. In many ways, self-sacrifice is among the most selfish of lifestyles, for it can't be sustained and often results in personal regret and enduring resentment among those in the lives of Emerging Sages who are most important. A professional coach can lend a hand in this regard.

### **Senior Sage Leaders**

More than half of the 50 Senior Sage leaders say there is no personal sacrifice in their civic engagements: “quite the opposite. I don't feel that either my wife or I are sacrificing anything. We are being enrichment by our community involvements.” Even if there is sacrifice, they tend to believe the benefits far outweigh any personal costs:

Right now, I don't feel like I sacrifice. Rather, my volunteer work feeds me. I went through a couple of marriages and had to choose between being who I am or being in the marriages. At this point in my life, my husband wholeheartedly supports what I do and is enthusiastic about it. My kids are all grown now, and they're proud of me, so it's fine.

A small number of Senior Sages feel mixed about whether their civic activities involve personal sacrifice:

Anyone who gives freely of their time for volunteer work feels there is some sacrifice, but they wouldn't do it if they didn't think it was worth it. Sure, instead of volunteering 40-50 hours a month, I could be doing other things like lying on a lounge or reading a series of essays. But that's not the point, is it?

One of our Senior Sage leaders describes a sequence of decisions when talking about sacrifice:

After retiring, I informed my wife that my first year was going to be given to enjoying our beautiful natural environment here. Then I acted on my belief that there was more to life than fishing and playing tennis and golf. So I got involved. I guess the only sacrifice I made was that I over-committed myself by getting involved in too many organizations at the same time. This was draining and prevented my wife and me from doing some of the leisure activities we had looked forward to all of our lives. My terming off two nonprofit boards has helped to restore balance in my life.

Those Senior Sages admitting to personal sacrifice offer two reasons: time away from family and giving up personal things they love to do:

Yes, I am sacrificing, and I am not happy about it. I am not getting as much time as I would like to watch my grandson grow-up. And I am not spending as much time with my husband or my horses as I would like. At the same time, I am a problem-solver, and when I say I am going to do something I follow through and live-up to my commitments. That's part of my values, of who I am.

*Type A:* In most instances, Senior Sage leaders say their civic engagements don't require sacrifice. Their lives are so structured that they find time for leisure activities, grand kids, the arts and, yes, civic engagement. They might occasionally complain that they don't have time to do needle point or go fishing, or they may regret not spending more time with family members. Senior Sages may have sacrificed income when moving to Grass Valley or Nevada City, but most often the sacrifice is not tied to their volunteer activities.

In some cases, these leaders simply may have continued with the "Type A" behavior of their youth by joining too many boards or taking on too many volunteer assignments. Where is the professional coach to help constrain their Type A behavior? But most soon adjust and find a way to secure more balance in their lives. Even among those Senior Sages who are still working full or part-time, there is a thoughtful wedding of paid employment and civic engagement. As is the case with many of the Emerging Sage leaders, Senior Sages find time to gain both energy and direction through their volunteer work— and this easily transfers to the work they do for pay.

*Letting Go:* If there is sacrifice, it is sometimes framed not as a loss of personal time but as an inability to exert influence over the nonprofit organization they are serving. Most Senior Sages realize at some point that they need to step back and let others assume formal leadership roles. They learn they have to "let go," much as they had to do with their own children earlier in their lives. As grandparents, Senior Sage leaders can play with their grandchildren without having full responsibility for them. Similarly, they can often participate actively in an organization without having to take full responsibility for its welfare—at least not to the extent if they were employed there full-time. This may be an important element of Generativity Four.

A professional coach can be of great value in helping overwhelmed clients "let go." This coaching assistance is especially helpful if their older client has to let go of their "obligations" to a nonprofit enterprise. There was an even greater challenge for some Senior Sages. They sometimes reported that they were unable to let go because their favored organization is in crisis. Their inner standards won't allow them to abandon the organization and their commitment to its welfare; they feel they have to remain actively involved, and often in its troubling minutia as well. This can lead to a real sense of sacrifice in the loss of family time and an increase in personal stress.

*Myth and Reality:* Often it is people who are not civically engaged who perceive such involvements as requiring great personal sacrifice. These men and women often remain disengaged precisely because they don't recognize that this type of work can be rewarding and a source of energy rather than a drain. If they do get involved in civic activities, it is sometimes out of a sense of duty or civic obligation, in which case there is often resentment—or their commitment is half-hearted and short-lived. It is important for a professional coach to help their clients discern the appropriate (and sustainable) reasons for civic engagement. These reasons should not reside in a sense of obligation—or simply doing "what is expected of them."

For most of the Senior Sage leaders we interviewed it is a matter of life-enhancement rather than sacrifice. The challenge is to get this point across to those who shy away from civic engagement because they are still holding onto the myth of sacrifice. Put another way: how do you convince baby boomers who just left the workforce and are tired of fighting organizational battles that things can be different in the civic arena? They can do new things, learn new skills and, yes, fight new battles—but on behalf of much worthier causes. How do you convince these men and women to work for personal gratification and community improvement rather than a paycheck? They must be convinced that they will get a “return on their investment,” but they often don’t know ahead of time that the return is physical, mental, and spiritual in nature.

Unless burdened with repressive poverty, illness, or major family responsibilities, many seniors can make important contributions to their community if they think it through and become motivated. For those at the bottom of the social-economic rung, the issue of sacrifice is often reflected in whether they actually can become civically involved in their community; the need to scramble to stay alive and provide shelter, food, and clothing for family members and themselves may simply make significant civic engagements impossible. One hopes this isn’t true—everyone has gifts they can share.

## **Balance Sheet II: Benefits of Civic Engagement**

The generative motivations that Sage leaders attribute to their civic engagements are closely linked to the benefits they receive from these engagements. However, benefits possess a different quality than motivations. Emerging and Senior Sage leaders all identify with the rich source of human talent and energy that exists in the community. Like the founders of Grass Valley and Nevada City, they see gold in the foothills—but the gold in this case is human capital rather than a mineral.

### **Emerging Sage Leaders**

Emerging Sage leaders identify seven major benefits that they receive from their civic involvements. During a coaching session, young leaders might wish to not only identify the benefits they now receive or could receive from work in their community, but also identify the specific community activities in which they are likely to find the greatest benefits. Every community has many needs. It is not being “selfish” for someone to pick those that yield the greatest benefit—for a young leader is likely to devote the greatest amount of sustained energy to these activities.

*Enduring Legacy:* The leading benefit appears to be personal satisfaction and fulfillment:

The great feeling that comes from giving back, of being involved with our youth and knowing I am impacting their lives, is a tremendous personal benefit. Those students will remain in our community and be our future contributors. Being involved with them also helps to keep me young.

Advancing community welfare is an important benefit identified by Emerging Sages:

The feeling of doing something good and well is inspiring for me. It’s the satisfaction that comes from being part of something that makes this community a better place. I get an equal voice at the table and have an understanding of how I can be of service. It makes my job easier as a professional.

Other benefits come from the work life of Emerging Sages: “Although there are days of great frustration, I feel fortunate to have the job I have. Being in a position where I feel like I make a difference. And making the community a better place for our families and children.”

In essence, Emerging Sage leaders value the benefit of *legacy*, leaving something behind that reflects on the lives they have lived: “Having peace of mind in knowing that I am investing my life in something worthy. I am able to go home every night and look in the mirror and know I have spent my day and my life in service to people, working for a cause greater than myself, hoping that it will outlast me.”

*Enduring Relationships:* Another major benefit to Emerging Sage leaders is the *personal relationships* they establish and build alongside their civic engagements: “My wife and I have so much fun in the relationships we have with other people through our civic engagements. We feel inspired to continue to do things. Some of the people I grew-up with here spend much of their free time still playing video games - I just don’t get it.”

Emerging Sage leaders talk a lot about relationships being formed through their civic involvements - deep, meaningful, enduring relationships that involve them with other engaging people. These relationships serve as a powerful antidote to the isolation that new technologies inevitably introduce. For without civic engagement, men and women of the technology age can be easily seduced by the virtual contact they have through the Internet and e-mail rather than seeking contact of substance with “real people.” The Emerging Sages spend time with colleagues who share the same values, concerns, and priorities. It’s almost a “church of community service” to which they and their collaborators belong. For most Emerging Sages, this certainly beats the attractions of social media.

*Lifelong Learners and “Flow”:* There is another generative benefit identified by many Emerging Sage leaders. This benefit is aligned with the recurrent theme of continuous life-long learning. Emerging Sages are often involved in new roles and seek learning about new facets of community life; they motivate themselves to grow and learn by taking on new and expanded challenges.

Moreover, this new learning is seen as fun, a joy rather than drudgery. Civic activities have become their social life and source of leisure as well. This reaffirms their current values and helps them to grow in new areas—like creative problem-solving, strategizing, and reading about new developments in a variety of fields. So, the personal horizons of Emerging Sages are being enlarged and they, in turn, are serving as role models for their own children and for other mid-life adults in Grass Valley and Nevada City.

Some of the older Emerging Sages describe their civic involvements in terms of “commitment” and “responsibility,” but many at the younger end of the age spectrum talk about the sheer enjoyment of the work they are doing. This is the process of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990): the incredible joy to be found in taking on and learning from a new challenge.

While many of the Senior Sage leaders become civically involved in order to find stimulation and meaning in their lives, most Emerging Sages are already highly stimulated: they juggle family, job, recreation, and civic involvement; and they don’t need more incentive. They seek out and find “flow” in their civic activities. One wonders if this pattern of multiple sources of flow will help these men and women to lead longer and healthier lives. Perhaps, as previously noted, engagement in civic activities is beneficial to health at virtually any age.

## **Senior Sage Leaders**

As in the case of the Emerging Sage Leaders, the Senior leaders identify seven major benefits—but they are not all the same as those identified by their younger colleagues. Professional coaches should recognize these differences when working with leaders of different ages. Like their Emerging Sage colleagues, Senior Sage leaders believe the most valued benefit is *personal fulfillment*: “Making these concerts and music available,

and the way it's done, gives me a feeling of real accomplishment. It also makes me feel that in some way, through the arts, we're making this a better place to live. That is quite fulfilling.”

*Building personal relationships:* As in the case of Emerging leaders, relationships are another perceived benefit that Senior Sages receive from their civic engagements:

First of all, there is a feeling of relevance. I think it is very dangerous for anyone not to feel relevant. I also get a lot of reinforcement from people who are happy with the contributions they believe that I make. And I've gotten to know a lot of good people who I would never have known without my community involvements.

For many Senior Sage leaders, what motivates them, and the benefits they receive from their civic involvements, are one-in-the same—helping others:

Take Habit for Humanity as an example. I work with a group of friends I have made within a Habitat construction crew. We go out and hammer nails and get a lot done while also having a good time. Best of all, we are helping families to have a nice home. What can beat that?

*Community betterment.* There is another generative benefit that Senior Sages identify from their civic involvements. It concerns the same push toward legacy that we find among the Emerging Sage leaders:

I feel I have been able to give back to the community that has given so much to our family.

I hope I am bringing value to organizations that are contributing to the overall benefit of the community. When I first came here, I saw what people were trying to do, and I'm proud of living in this area. I've always been one to practice what I preach, help out if I can to make the community even better. I volunteer for both little things and big things.

This benefit is directly tied to Stage Three Generativity:

My wife and I have been involved with others in growing the arts, and 32 years ago there wasn't much here. Now the arts are flourishing. Yes, one of our theatres, which I loved, closed, but we still have three or four other active theatre companies. And we have two premier and very active musical organizations, leaving aside the other music groups here that seem endless. So, we have a community that is physically beautiful, somewhat remote, but has a rich cultural life.

*Belonging and Relationships:* Like their Emerging counterparts, Senior Sage leaders often speak of engaging the community through their volunteer work – the sense of belonging to a great cause that brings them together with kindred spirits. Their commitments and passions are especially exhibited and fulfilled through their favored organizations. They feel worthy and worthwhile because they have something to give, and their talents and experiences are recognized by others.

Senior Sages realize with pride that they possess the skills and motivation that are needed to make a difference. It is through identifying their unique skill set (often with the assistance of a professional coach) that older leaders are likely to not only be of greater value to their community, but also find others in their community who bring complementary skills and knowledge to the task of community development. It is with greater self-knowledge that one can most effectively collaborate with others.. Furthermore, it is through collaboration that senior leaders finds the opportunities to leave (or avoid) the silos of old age and build new and enduring friendships.



*Giving Back During the Senior Years:* It is with regard to this benefit that many Senior Sage leaders diverge from their younger colleagues. These Senior leaders often say they benefit greatly from the sense that they are leaving their community in a better place than they found it. Legacy is alive and well. They feel they are leaving a mark on the community's quality of life. One Senior Sage puts it succinctly: "I'm just proud to live here." But there seems to be much more to appreciate from the benefits derived by Senior Sages when they become generative during their senior years.

We note that many Senior Sages say they had become isolated in their early retirement due to being "burned-out" from years of corporate, nonprofit, or government politics. This is often the source of an old age silo. So, it is understandable that some Senior Sages retreat into themselves and became "curmudgeons" at first. Then in time, they discover they are experiencing personal stagnation and look for opportunities to become vital again—especially if they have chosen to work with a professional coach.

Many previously isolated Senior Sages that we interviewed have found that their civic engagements pulled them back into the world. This ultimately may be the greatest benefit that is derived from civic engagement. Rather than their volunteer work being regarded as a source of tension or sacrifice, these Senior Sages discoverer that civic work can integrate very nicely with family and recreational interests. This insight can often be effectively delivered by a professional coach who serves as a *Re-engagement Coach*.

The first step out of withdrawal and isolation is often the most difficult. This why a *Re-engagement coach* can be of great value. However, once engaged in the community these seniors often acquire new energy and renewed purpose. And they gain a real sense of balance in their lives. Further, Senior Sages in Grass Valley and Nevada City often indicated during their interview that they feel better after providing community service (physical benefits) and feel intellectually stimulated (mental benefits). In addition, they benefit greatly from the camaraderie of their fellow Sage leaders (interpersonal benefits). Put simply, Senior Sages find that civic work feeds not only their spirit but also their entire being. What better way for re-engagement coaches to market their services!

## **Generativity or Stagnation?**

We conclude this essay and our exploration of civic engagement and the relationship between professional coaching and generativity four by turning once again to Erik Erikson. We focus again on the fundamental choice that Erikson (1963) first identified when describing the stages of adult development: *generativity or stagnation?* Virtually all of our Emerging and Senior Sages know persons in the community who possess sage leadership qualities but are far removed from being civically engaged. During their interviews, these Sage leaders describe these reticent leaders as affable, generous, and knowledgeable.

The Sages describe their positive characteristics with frustration in their voice—for they are unsuccessful in motivating these potential community activists and leaders: "So why can't I get them involved? Why don't they readily recognize the personal benefits that can come from civic engagement? Why don't they perk-up when I say that my soul is being fed by the volunteer work that I am doing? I care about these people and know that civic engagement can offer a wonderful path to renewed physical, mental and even spiritual health." Sages wish they had answers to these questions and speculate about possible reasons for non-engagement.

## **Fear and Isolation**

Some of the Sage leaders believe the reticence is about fear. Fear of putting themselves out there in a civic organization and getting stuck in a mess of complex, all-consuming challenges. Fear of being asked to do

something they feel they can't do, either because of time constraints or lack of direct experience. Perhaps the reticent among older members of the Grass Valley and Nevada City are tired. They find relief in getting away from the politics in which they once worked and often served as leaders for many years. Their silo is safe and comforting. It is reasonable to ask, then, why would anyone want to get drawn back into this milieu when they can be with their friends or plant flowers in solitude.

They might offer their own reasons for noninvolvement in their community: "If I get involved and my commitment grows too large, how do I get out of it and reclaim my personal life?" "It is much easier to find friendships in leisure time activities than build them through civic networks." "If I am not making money, why would I do it? Why would I do the same thing again, but this time for free?" It is understandable that uninvolved seniors may judge civic work to involve sacrifice if they can't see personal or community benefits. Unfortunately, they don't or can't yet understand that civic involvement is a different kind of work that has its own rewards. If they were fortunate enough to step out of their silo for a moment to meet with a Re-engagement coach, then they might come to this liberating insight.

Perhaps it is a lack of connections in the community. Maybe they don't need a coach—just need someone to reach out their welcoming hand. Many senior men and women have moved to Grass Valley or Nevada City in recent years and don't yet know many people. They are on the outside of the core community looking in. No one has asked them to participate in a volunteer activity. Or they may feel that what they have to contribute to their new community won't be valued. In other instances, new arrivals have moved into gated communities where they get into a year-in-and-year-out routine of playing bridge all day and watching a bit of TV before falling asleep.

Their friendship network becomes limited to other residents in the gated community who share the same values and hold dear the same life priorities. So, their lives outside this community become limited to shopping, banking, and attending the occasional theatrical or musical performance. While these potential Sage leaders do have a "community" it is highly restricted, lacking in diversity or much soul-feeding attraction—at least from the perspective of the Senior Sage leaders whom we interviewed. It should not be surprising that this lifestyle can become numbing and lead to stagnation and despair as the aging process unfolds. They live in a collective silo with all of the amenities—other than most sources of Generative Four gratification.

### **Life Experiences and Priorities**

Another factor might be life experiences. Potential civic leaders may never have had the kind of challenges and support in their lives that motivate them to want to give back to others. They declare, "I don't do that." They set aside any possibility that they will taste the benefits of civic involvement. In some instances, the senior leaders in particular have "grown up" in corporate culture. They don't want to start over in learning how to work and be influential in the culture of service and community-oriented organizations. They had clear status in the corporate world, but this doesn't translate to the world of volunteers.

Often these reticent leaders may not have had a history of public service in their own families of origin. That might make sense if it were not for the fact that many of the project's Sage leaders also had no tradition of civic engagement in their early lives; their parents were farmers who lived a long way from town, or they grew-up in economically challenged families that had no discretionary time for anything but income-generating work. Somehow these Sage leaders learned the value of civic engagement without having had parental role models. It is interesting to muse about why and how these men and women discovered the benefits of voluntary service to their community. It is also of value to muse about how a Re-Engagement

coach might set up shop in a community such as Grass Valley or Nevada City in order to bring about expanded community engagement in this engagement. An organization such as the Center for Nonprofit Leadership might be established to help promote this coaching services.

Perhaps it is not so simple. The lack of civic involvement on the part of some reticent leaders might be a matter of priorities. Other things going on in the lives of uninvolved members of a community are deemed more important. This doesn't make them selfish human beings; however, a lack of motivating experiences does make them less inclined to serve other people and therefore more difficult to interest in things civic. As one Senior Sage observes, "It may be essential to get involved in civic activities right after moving here, and this involvement should not be short-term or superficial." The lesson: If you are just pouring drinks at a Music in the Mountains event, this might not be enough to motivate significant community involvement—and not enough to yield the tangible benefits of civic engagement. On the other hand, small investments of time and energy may, in fact, eventually lead to something bigger. The question of most viable pathways to civic engagement remains open.

## Conclusions

There are many questions and few answers about why men and women who possess Sage leadership qualities are not civically involved in Western Nevada County—and about the choice between generativity and stagnation. While we can't provide definitive answers regarding civic involvement, we don't want to sidestep the fundamental question: *generativity or stagnation?*

We conclude this series of essays by addressing this question. In our sixth essay we ask a particularly challenging question that has implications for the introduction of spirituality into the coaching enterprise (Bergquist, 2023a; Bergquist, 2023b). Does the choice between generativity and stagnation relate in some way to the absence or avoidance of soul and spirit? Do we escape from civic involvement and possibly all other forms of generative engagement because, in some sense, we are afraid of our own soulful and spiritual awakening? These are the difficult and often elusive questions we address in the final essay in this series. The answers to these questions perhaps tell us something about the wellspring of deep caring and generativity in all its enactments.

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