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Adaptable Leadership

A Strengths-based Approach to
Challenging Environments and Difficult Choices

Wendy Campbell
Anne Radford

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Inside this issue

Welcome to February 2014 issue of AI Practitioner

In this issue, *Adaptable Leadership: A Strengths-based Approach to Challenging Environments and Difficult Choices*, you will find nine articles exploring the challenges facing adaptable leaders navigating complexity by choosing to look at their challenging situations honestly and appreciatively.

Enrique J. Zaldivar's Feature Choice article "Authenticity and Accountability: Key

to An Appreciative Stance to Adaptable Leadership" combines AI and multicultural competency principles, emphasizing the importance of discovering our unique cultural lens for effective leadership.

Research Notes presents a review of an earlier AI Practitioner issue, *Appreciative Inquiry in Asia*. We hope it will inspire many to read the August 2013 issue anew or offer their own review of previous issues.

Newly published resources as well as the classics on leadership have been brought together in AI Resources by the new editorial team.

All good wishes as we start a new subscription year!

Anne Radford
Editor, AI Practitioner

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A Strengths-based Approach to Challenging Environments and Difficult Choices

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Hope, Despair and Forgiveness

The Foundation of Leadership Resilience

A Conversation in Two Voices

We invite you into our conversation and reflective questions about hope, despair and forgiveness and how these ideas are powerful in understanding our own and others' leadership resilience. In deeply reflecting upon these ideas, we believe a pathway opens to being adaptable and resilient in the good times and the highly complex times of leading over a lifetime. We offer you appreciative questions to reflect on about your foundation of leadership resilience.

My Heart Sang to me of Leadership

*My heart sang to me of leadership,
Like a Siren's call urging me into the shallows.
Her voice was pure, a soprano song
on the wind.
With the courage of Beowulf
I stepped onto the dry land,
golden goblet in hand.
My funeral song already humming
on the wind.
But, you haven't read Beowulf
Middle English is not your tongue.
You do not know the Siren's song.
Her archetype morphed down through
the years from leader as hero, to
facilitator to coach to collaborator
So you run your boat onto the rocky shore
And step into a landscape without heroes, archetypes,
Dragons or treasure
and you are asked to lead,
Your voice hoarse from singing a refrain
from which no leader returns
unharmd.*



JMcB 2012



The crucible of leadership resilience

Opening thoughts

Resilience is at the core of adaptable leadership. As long-term leaders and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) practitioners, we have explored, both for ourselves and with others, the nature of leading and of resilience. In this exploration, we have found that three tenets of a “leaderly life” – hope, despair and forgiveness – are part of the foundation of resilience. They form a powerful link to strengths-based leadership and to AI. Here we share a conversation and offer up questions that have helped us and others to reflect on hope, despair and forgiveness.

Conversation

Why do you think having a deep understanding of hope, despair and forgiveness fosters resilience and adaptability in leaders?

Jeanie: As resilient leaders, we have to be able to let go of things that are not working. We have to have an ability to forgive both ourselves and others. Forgiveness is an act of letting go of the emotions of despair, anger, hurt. The ability to let go, to forgive in times of despair, is grounded in living with a hopeful view. A hopeful view focuses on strengths and opportunities and builds resilience over time.

How do you see hope, despair and forgiveness?

Joan: I have come to understand, for myself as both an institutional leader and as a consultant working with leaders, that these three notions have a profound impact on the day-to-day of leadership. As an AI practitioner and because I hold a hopeful worldview, I see the generative capacity of leaders. I have also been visited by despair, particularly when I see the mistreatment of others or when I myself as a leader have lost my way. Forgiveness is deeply understanding that the past is not going to change. Forgiveness is difficult and is an act of conscious will – a state of mind that opens the heart to the possibilities of the future. Hope, despair and forgiveness are constant in leadership and striving to understand them builds resilience.

What feeds your ability to hold a hopeful view?

Jeanie: The first thing that comes to mind is love. The love that surrounds me and the love I have for others grounds me in the goodness of human beings. Love is about seeing the best in others and oneself. My hopeful view is supported and amplified by love. The hope is seeing possibility no matter what is happening around me. This view fosters a sense of resilience as a leader. As a facilitator this shows up as trusting the process and being confident that the processes that I lead will surface other people’s wisdom.

What is the relationship between hope and despair?

Joan: I agree with your idea of hope and a hopeful view being grounded in being able to see possibility no matter what is happening. Into this landscape, despair can enter like a fast train coming in the dead of the night. Despair comes in so many forms for leaders. It can come as a temporary glancing blow or it can bring

'As resilient leaders, we have to be able to let go of things that are not working.' Jeanie

you to your knees. My greatest strength in these times as a leader is my ability to authentically and respectfully see my own responsibility and the responsibility of others. Reflecting on the question "what is my greatest strength in the darkness of despair?" has built my resilience and allowed me to find my way out of despair.

What allows your despair to change and shift?

Jeanie: To shift and change in times of despair is about being fully present in the moment and being mindful of what is happening. When I am working with challenging people, being authentically present and deeply listening allows me to see the other person's needs and possible movements forward. It allows me to let the path emerge and be responsive to what is happening and what needs to happen.

Say more about forgiveness in your leadership life...

Joan: Forgiveness is the hardest of the three tenets for me. Practicing a hopeful view can be honed over time. Despair comes often unbidden but forgiveness is a conscious act of will. Each time in my leadership life that I've opened my heart to forgiveness, a door has opened to possibilities I'd never imagined. Despair is like an anchor weighing down my leadership. When I use my strength to lift it up into forgiveness, hope and a hopeful view return to me.

'Hope, despair and forgiveness are constant in leadership and striving to understand them builds resilience.' Joan

Our closing thoughts and reflective questions

Reflection upon these three tenets of hope, despair and forgiveness, and how they arrive in our lives builds resilience, because we begin to understand how they act and interact with each other over a lifetime of leading.

In closing, we offer appreciative questions that we have used with ourselves and with others to reflect on these notions.

- How do I practice hope in my leadership?
- What have I done today to practice hope?
- How has recognizing and fostering hope allowed me to persist in leadership and live through challenging times?
- If I practiced hope as a tenet of my leadership, what best things in my leadership would grow?
- What was my greatest strength in the darkest moment of my leadership?
- How do I consciously exercise that strength? What was the outcome?
- Who enabled me to stand up again in the hardest moment of my leadership?
- How did/will I foster the power of that relationship?
- Tell a story of forgiveness. What opened my heart to forgiveness? How did forgiveness change my leadership?



The Old Bridge

*I touch your smooth boards
and wonder.*

*Do you envy the living tree nearby?
Do you ache to stretch up skyward?
to tilt upright toward the stars?*

*Or is it enough:
that lovers lean on your warm wood
that the lonely find refuge here
that poets wonder about your beginnings*

*You are forever moving toward beginning again
as your wood rots back to the earth.
Can you feel that you will live again
the joy of sprouting the ache of the axe.*

*You will always be bridge,
between anger and hope
between sorrow and joy
between old and new*

*Whisper to me the secret of being bridge.
I am listening,
my hand gentle upon your heartwood.*

JMcB 2010

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