

Conceptual Definition of Leadership

There is nowhere to go and nothing to do but be of service. I found the foundation for my definition of leadership in this quote by a Peruvian Gaucho originally quoted by Jeff Saltz, a nationally syndicated speaker. The servant leader is one who truly gains influence through service to others. His/her strength is a function of the strength and sustenance of those around him/her.

It takes courage to serve. One must give oneself up to a cause, one in which conversations founded on questions that matter help transform our world into one that is sustainable and that honors our humanity. These leaders are not usually those you would find glorified in business magazines, but they come from all walks of life and from all communities.

In my specific work community, Spirit Mountain Casino, I have introduced new language to reflect my philosophy of leadership. I view my organization as a living system and based on my interest in leadership in living systems, my focus has been on fostering self-organization through the creation of conversations at the grass roots of the organization. So as not to cloud understanding with terminology that confuses, I have focused on fostering conversations, people talking together, and have left out living systems language. Self-organization is however, language that I have found useful. Gone is the focus on communication, a term that seemed to create nothing more than a continuous stream of e-mails, memos, and directives. We, like so many organizations, had a communication crisis. Learning and

understanding leading to self-organization, was non-existent. A focus on conversation has spurred a transformation in the way people work together. Herein lies the core of my definition of leadership. It first and foremost is embedded in a living systems context. In the work by Brown and Isaacs in creating The World Café, leading in a living system is based on conversations that lead to self-organization and through self-organization emerges transformation.

Several capabilities will prove essential for leaders interested in fostering living systems that are characterized by collaboration and networks of conversational relationships. These capabilities include the ability to frame questions that matter, convene learning conversations, support Appreciative Inquiry, foster shared meaning, nurture communities of practice and use collaborative technologies. Brown and Isaacs (1996) These are the attributes that I believe to be essential to a servant leader. I provide an expanded exploration of the role of the leader in a living system in my paper *Con versare: To Dance Together* (Inman 2002).

References

- Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (1996/1997). Conversation as a Core Business Process. The Systems Thinker, 7(10), 1-3. Retrieved August 3, 2002 from the World Wide Web: www.pegasus.com
- Inman, J. (2002). Con versare: To Dance Together (). Sheridan, OR: Wetherhaven Productions.