Facilitating More Servant Leadership & Stewardship

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To the world, you may just be somebody... but to somebody, you may just be the world. Non nobis solum sed toti mundo nati.” “Not for ourselves, but for the whole world were we born”.

The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts Motto*

The Catalyst

Social psychologists warn of the growth of a kind of programmed indifference in large segments of the populace. Others speak of a developing "culture of narcissism", that is, the cultivation of private happiness at the expense of public responsibility. A dominant, driving force behind this is ‘consumerism’. “We have seen so much in society, how generations emulate those they look up to. Unfortunately they have too few good ones, and more they are tough, plastic, looking good and making a lot of money, models. Not the caliber on which to build a healthy society” (a field study participant, 2001). Stewards may be the alchemists required in these dynamic and troubling times. It is like a relic found in the attic, amoung less valuable items. Today, it is worth more than its original value (Levan, 1998). Stewardship refers to the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of a community, of the environment, of an institution, or of one’s gifts of time, treasure and talent. Stewardship involves graciously receiving gifts, responsibly tending to those gifts, lovingly sharing them, and returning them with increase” (Clements, 1997).

The questions raised in these times of daunting international injustices, swelling person stress require insightful answers. The questions posed by Robert Greenleaf (1977) are vital to consider today. ‘How do persons who provide service grow as persons; and how do they enable those being served to become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?’ Other questions require consideration. ‘Are we isolated individuals, or do we each live as a part of relationships? Is moral self-knowledge necessary for personal growth? Can any society prosper or endure without developing a basic sense of duty and responsibility among its members? How does a pluralistic society inspire its members to share a sense of duty to become active servant leaders and responsible stewards? Which educational methods would be most instrumental?
Social Responsibility

A study participant poignantly stated, “While we have groups like the United Way, who do good work, they also take away from the stewardship everyone should be feeling. They just think there is this service, it should be taken care of, it is now not my problem. Here’s my money now go and deal with it. We are abdicating stewardship to service groups and hoping the work is done.” Greenleaf said that the North American cultures are not creating more servant leaders. We lull ourselves into believing it is being done. “It is not being done” (Greenleaf, 1977). “I have been using my gifts and teaching stewardship throughout the United States and Canada for 20 years; I share with others my experience, knowledge and gifts without fees. I have found that there is a tremendous hunger for God but people don’t know how” (a field study participant, 2000).

The forces for good and evil in the world are propelled by the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of individual beings. What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civilization in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of individuals. Stewardship research provides creative techniques to help each person develop his or her potential as an individual and as a contributing, responsible member of society who will: think clearly, feel deeply, and act wisely. Offering techniques that prompt individuals to act on their values and to use their time, treasure and talent adds benefit also to the broader community. Increased human well being depends on utilizing the imaginations and powers of many more people and on building networks that strengthen human willingness to more actively care for one another.

Cooperative Inquiry Approach

Many report that more intelligent humane, spiritual and ecological approaches to the world’s challenges are needed (Theobald, 1997; Greenleaf, 1977; Fox, 1995). This increased 'conscientizacion' and a growing awareness that human well being can be improved through self-discipline that produces more creativity and less destructiveness. Cooperative, multi-disciplinary approaches including values of wholeness, trust, valuing diversity, interdependence and interconnectedness, and honesty are needed. This is based on the assumption that the universe is made up of wholes within wholes, and it is the human element, which merely overlooks the connection of everything to everything else. This “interconnectedness of reality” (Miller, 1998) is a value needed to replace fragmentation, divisiveness, and competition. Through collaboration, conscious, caring and capable individuals will replace destructive ways with healthier lifestyles that create more conscientious communities.

Those who facilitate giving of oneself and being of service to others help to create wholeness. Wholesomeness is achieved best through serving. Management specialists say that stewardship is the choice for service and suggest that humans serve best through partnerships, rather than patriarchy. "Stewardship is the choice for service. A culture of dependency is the antithesis of stewardship, and so an empowerment philosophy and practice become essential" (Block, 1993). Creating a stewardship culture requires including people in meaningful ways and ensuring the development of needed skills. Facilitating more stewardship would inspire people to share their abilities, returning to them more satisfaction and accomplishment while also building more capable and caring communities. A participant put it this way, “Everything we have is to share, we have an obligation to care. We are created to be a community of helpers.” But people
are longing for education on how to do this.

References

Greenleaf, Robert. (1977) Servant leadership, a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness. New York: Paulist Press