

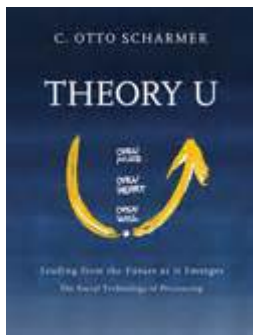
Strengths and Genius in the VSLLC®

Virtual Servant Leadership Learning Community

Stories from Ann McGee-Cooper

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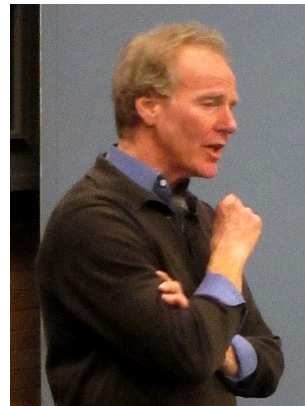
In Otto Scharmer's book, "Theory U" he explores profound change with more than 100 exceptional leaders. Bill O'Brien, CEO of Hanover Insurance, said his most important learning experience in leading profound change is this:

"The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener." Scharmer continues to explain that "The nature of this inner place in leaders is something of a mystery to us. Studies of athletes' minds and imaginations as they prepare for a competitive event have led to practices designed to enhance athletic performance "from the inside out," so to speak. ..But in the arena of management and leading transformational change, we know very little about this inner dimension, and very seldom are specific techniques applied to enhance management performance from the inside out. ...This lack of knowledge constitutes a blind spot in our approach to leadership and management." Within our

SLLC we have focused on that inner work and now we go a step further into developing growth in ourselves and others.

Peter Senge says it like this:

"Gardeners do not entreat their seeds to grow.



Can you imagine a gardener leaning over his or her seedling and shouting "grow!" Gardeners understand that a seed has the potential to grow and the seed and its environment create

a self-reinforcing growth process. As more water and nutrients are drawn into the seed, its primitive root system extends further, drawing in still more water and nutrients, extending the roots even more. As in all of nature's growth processes, what is growing starts small and for some time most of the change is underground. This is the first principle of leadership –understand the self-

reinforcing processes of growth. If these do not operate, change will not generate energy, it will absorb energy. This is why so many people who take on the role of change agents burn out."

As we have continued to move through the inner work of servant leadership – it sometimes moves us upside down before we experience all the gains made. Thus it requires a tremendous amount of patience with ourselves for the seeds of inner work to blossom.

In order to nurture our growth and the growth of others –we now turn to the work of recognizing and fostering strengths and genius in ourselves and others. Ann McGee-Cooper tells a wonderful story about how Robert Greenleaf coached her to live more fully into her genius. I have inserted [\[in blue\]](#) some approaches we have been using in our VSLLC that relate to this story:



When I reflect on the time that I was coached by Robert Greenleaf I remember how he listened in a different very quiet way. He listened at a deep level. He helped me to honor my deepest self and he used a lot of silence. When a person uses a lot of silence in a conversation you start hearing yourself in a different way.

Greenleaf would use active listening, mirroring back what I would say in a different way. It wasn't just the vocabulary, it was the tone of voice and where he went in himself when he mirrored back. He wasn't embellishing what I was saying. He

would help me hear myself at a different level [\[Listening and use of silence\]](#).

Greenleaf would often tell stories. It would be a way of helping me see what I hadn't seen. It would take me into my own life journey. Stories can interrupt the abstractions of our thinking and take us into our heart center. [\[Use of stories\]](#)

He was a master at asking open questions. I learned quickly that he wasn't expecting me to answer questions in that moment –he was posing something for me to ponder. He would sometimes smile at me and say "live with the question." This was because I would think I needed to immediately answer any question he asked. And he was one of many ways he encouraged me to listen to and trust my intuition. [\[Asking open questions\]](#)

Greenleaf reminded me of the importance of helping a person to always find their dignity. Then they learn easily and deeply. There were many ways that he affirmed my uniqueness. He would ask me questions and be truly curious about my answers. [\[Asking appreciative questions\]](#)

I remember his face and I can see it now. He would be so attentive and he was so fascinated by my ideas. I went thinking of him as a guru and master. I wanted Greenleaf to tell me what to do about a specific program and how I could be a messenger of his vision of servant leadership. And I wanted him to tell me the answers. And that was not at all the spirit of what Greenleaf thought of servant leadership or his role in it. The way he mirrored back to me in my heart –he connected to me to many thoughts and thought leaders –but always saying "Ann, listen to your Spirit. You already know all of the answers to the questions you're asking. But by creating more space in your life and reverence for that inner wisdom –you'll find it." He affirmed my intuition. [\[Lifting up strengths of others\]](#)

Ann concludes by saying: *"Finding the courage to live into the gifts we have been given is very much a part of the journey of servant leadership. I felt so unprepared to do the work Greenleaf asked me to do in those early years. And he just smiled and said "create dangerously...trust yourself and you'll know. There is a quality of "surrender" into genius. You don't muscle it forward. It is that humility to trust it to be there and to trust Spirit to guide you. When you are working from genius you may lose track of time. That is a universal indicator that your genius has stepped forward and you can ride the wave –there is something that carries you. What stops you is from the ego. What lifts you is when you're connecting to the needs."*
[Finding courage]

We might take time now to notice what practices have supported us individually and collectively. These are some that we are focusing on that we see as helpful practices on this journey: deep listening, silence, sharing meaningful stories, and asking open and/or appreciative questions. We look forward to taking our collective wisdom about the ways of being and practices that matter further in our next few conversations with you...as we move into our work on gifts and genius.

Seminars and additional resources are available from Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at AMCA.com