

Finding Your Calling... Confessions of an A/B

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When we present a session on life-purpose and calling as it relates to servant leadership, there are generally two different responses. One group of participants smile, tear up, and tell heart-warming stories of how they knew from an early time how they felt a call to be a teacher, nurse, pastor, architect, fashion buyer or whatever their chosen profession. In this same group, others equally moved by this topic tell how someone in their lives inspired them to find their professional calling and how they wanted to “give back” something to the world.

The other group of participants look puzzled, somewhat uncomfortable, and after eavesdropping on a few small groups of these individuals, we could hear the troubled participants whisper, “what in the heck are they talking about? I don’t feel anything

except looking forward to how I am going to spend my time when I get to retire.” And I must confess that I empathize with this group.

Before jumping to conclusions about the 2nd group of “uncalled” participants, know that they are equally dedicated, hardworking, sincere people as the first group of “called” participants. They just don’t connect to the discussion around “calling” like some who weep and are overcome with emotion by just recalling their life-purpose story.

There is a very popular story about calling that most of us have heard either at a seminar or in a sermon. One version goes like this:

A traveler came upon a group of three hard-at-work stonemasons, and asked each in turn what he

was doing. The first said, “I am sanding down this block of marble.” The second said, “I am preparing a foundation.” The third said, “I am building a cathedral.”



The origin of the story is from the *Rule of St. Benedict*, written about 530 A.D. It is widely used to

illustrate the importance of knowing a vision or life-purpose/calling. It sounds so simple and easy when

we hear the story...know that our jobs are about more than the toil of moving rocks, we are contributing to something that will be magnificent. But sometimes, it is just harder to connect the dots than it is in the teaching story.



Calling and Brain Dominance Insights

After pondering this some, I have come to believe our brains respond to “calling” through the different filters of the HBDI® quadrants. First, we agree that a job and calling may be two very different things. But when the discussion begins and we have worked in a profession for 5, 10, or 20 years, some of us automatically connect the two. “What is your calling?” It must be what I have given 40+ hours a week of my life to for the past twenty years. And when that happens the A/B side (left

hemisphere) of our brains sees this differently from the C/D side (right hemisphere) of our brains.

Those of us with A/B quadrant dominances think of our jobs as a source of income, an objective analysis of our professional competencies,

what we do well, a source of financial security for ourselves or families. It is very concrete and literal. It is devoid of emotion. It is just what we do to support ourselves or our families.

Many C/D quadrants think of jobs as calling...a purpose for being in this world...what they are contributing.

There are feelings of passion, emotion, things they care about, dreams of accomplishment, risk, daring, hopes for the future. It is what brings them their greatest joys. All of these are holistically connected, seamlessly. There is even a feeling of spirituality wrapped around this idea of “calling” (which, by the way) used to be only used in a religious context of “being called” to the ministry, or mission field, or a life of devotion. That can make us A/B’s even more nervous when you bring up this idea of “calling.” “Gee...this feels weird ...are you asking me to go down to the altar and commit my life to being an electrical engineer?”

So...herein we have the challenge. Perhaps this can help us understand why we have two different responses to the idea of “calling.”

“Help! I’ve Fallen and I Can’t Get Up Find My Calling!”

Deborah Vogeles-Welch likes to define calling with this question “Out of all the work you do in life, what brings you the most happiness, the most fulfillment?” Find the answer to this question and you will at least be closer to finding your calling.

Ann McGee-Cooper likes to associate calling with “flow.” This concept was first written about by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. **Flow** is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity.

Ann suggests that we can discover our calling by paying attention to those times in our lives when we are in this state of flow. When in flow, we are doing our life purpose or calling.

If it is a challenge to name your calling, some find it helpful to start with some guiding questions. For A/B’s, some analysis, fact-finding, converging, and planning may help

clear the fog. Some examples of questions might be:

1. What are my strengths?
2. What are my passions?
3. What are my causes?
4. Where might all of these intersect?
5. What gives me a lump in my throat, a tear in my eye, or a warm, fuzzy feeling when I do it?
6. When my eulogy is given, what work that I accomplished would make me most proud?



What Does Calling Have to Do with Servant Leadership?

Sometimes people ask us: “Isn’t servant leadership something that just naturally develops with some people?”

They just naturally possess a caring, serving heart?” Everyone knows at least one person in their lives who was a natural servant-leader...they didn’t go to any management or leadership classes to learn this way of being—it was just a part of who they were. This brings us to an interesting point...to be good at servant leadership, don’t you have to feel a sense of fulfillment in serving others? This is where it gets a little tricky. In teaching/studying servant leadership, you can learn active listening, you can write a mission statement, you can do an activity to “go appreciate someone.” But

can you really be a true servant-leader without a calling to serve?

This brings us back to where we started with the called and the uncalled. Just from watching many people in many organizations through the years, it is often more difficult to embrace servant leadership without feeling a “calling to serve others.” Greenleaf named it very simply...”servant leadership is a feeling of wanting to serve, *to serve first.*” Can you be trained to like people, care for them, think of others first, empathize, listen rather than tell? Maybe...but our bias is that you will have a much higher success rate if you can tap into a deeper sense of calling.

For us literal, concrete, A/B types, it may be a bit more challenging, or perhaps we may just express it differently. For the C/D types, it may come somewhat easier with the tools of the quadrants they are gifted in...people, emotions, spirituality, creative risking, intuition, etc. But A/B’s, don’t give up, and by all means, stay in the conversation. Stay curious. Keep searching. We can use the gifts of our quadrant (analysis, planning, objectivity, sequential ordering, etc.) to help find the answers. While it may be elusive at first,

the more we risk exploring, the better chance we have of finding it and naming it.

When that happens, we will be “building a cathedral” rather than just carrying rocks all day long.



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