

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."

(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Happy summer all. I am just back from an intense series of international trips – to Germany with faculty and staff to visit the Luther sites on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation; to Norway to see the King and gather our Norwegian alumni; and to Italy to present a paper on our work with immigrant communities at a conference on democracy and higher education. Whew. I'm not sure what time zone my body is in, but I'm happy to be home and able to settle in with stacks of books and magazines that deserve attention. I trust that all is well for you and I wish you rest and renewal in these summer days.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>We the people<<

My many travels delayed this issue of Notes a few days, which allowed me to see the remarkable special section in the Sunday *New York Times* (July 2, 2017) that offers an annotated Constitution. I commend it to all of you.

The text of the Constitution is annotated with comments from lawmakers, authors, journalists and academics—from a variety of perspectives. It is just the sort of exercise that reminds us that our country's founding documents are living, breathing articulations of our continuing experiences and aspirations. It is reflective practice at work.

In these dissonant and distressing times, we must stand resolute in our commitments to a democracy, shaped and guided by an informed and engaged citizenry. There is no higher calling as citizens.

In his accompanying essay, author Garry Wills states that "A mythical view of the "genius of the Constitution" is that it creates checks and balances by letting different interests or factions compete, until the best faction wins. But there is no such thing as a best faction in Madison's thinking. A faction is by definition an interest opposed to the common good. Madison did not want to

encourage competing interests but to arrive at a “disinterested” view of the common purpose, what Enlightenment philosophers called “virtue” – or public-spiritedness.”

Surely that virtue – despite all of the challenges and obstacles to its pursuit – must still be our passionate cause. On this particular Independence Day, may it be urgently so.

>>Chief strategy officers<<

I’ve gone back ten years to a classic *Harvard Business Review* article to reflect on what we’ve learned at Augsburg over the past several years with a focus strategic thinking and specifically the appointment of a “Chief Strategy Officer.” R. Timothy S. Breene, Paul Nunes and Walter E. Shill authored “The Chief Strategy Officer” in October 2007 and pointed to an emerging trend that we have benefited from in our strategic work.

Certainly there are appropriate and important roles for boards and CEOs in establishing institutional strategy, but who wakes up every morning with the mandate to walk into any office, tell someone that “what you’re doing is not in line with institutional strategy and we need to fix that”, and spark some sort of transformation? That is the question that the HBR article suggests is answered with the role of a chief strategy officer.

The authors suggest that this trend is prompted by an increasingly complex landscape – shifting organizational structures, globalization, new regulations, and the struggle to innovate. At the same time, strategy itself has shifted from a periodic process to a continuous demand. Strategic thinking instead of strategic planning.

The role can be defined variously in different organizations, but “(F)undamentally, these are people who wield the authority, and have the complex range of skills, to make strategy happen. To borrow a term from French cinema, they act as *realisateurs*.”

What are the key qualifications for a chief strategy officer? The authors suggest:

- The person is deeply trusted by the CEO – they are given carte blanche to talk institution-wide challenges and seize new opportunities. A long professional and personal history creates the confidence and common purpose that is demanded of such a role.
- The person is a master of multitasking – he/she must be capable of switching between environments and activities without losing speed or credibility.
- The person is a jack-of-all-trades – disparate experiences across functional and operational areas are critical.
- The person is a doer, not just a thinker – strategic work is almost evenly split between strategy development and strategy execution.
- The person is the guardian of horizon two – the medium term, not short or long-term, can fall through the crack, meaning this role helps refocus organizational attention on the one to four year horizon that is critical for strategy execution.
- The person is an influencer, not a dictator – pulling rank seldom works, the CSO sways others with deep knowledge, integrity and ability to communicate across organizational boundaries.
- The person is comfortable with ambiguity – the horizon for impact can be long and the role can evolve rapidly as circumstances dictate, calling for emotional intelligence.

- The person is objective – above reproach when it comes to pursuing a strategic vision for an institution.

The CSO brings focus and discipline to decision-making that drives and sustains organizational change, meaning that this person must be able to speak truth to power when an easier path or some sort of groupthink afflicts an organization. Successful chief strategy officers employ a handful of high-level principles:

- Mind the time horizons – the CSO is guardian of the space one to three years out when the decisions made (or not made) today will show consequences.
- Balance strategy formulation and execution – this should be an almost even split.
- Influence appropriately – build coalitions, use power wisely, work every angle.
- Develop IT and HR smarts – deep knowledge in these two key areas is central to strategy execution.

As I mentioned, I found this article incredibly valuable in reflecting on the role of Augsburg’s chief strategy officer, my friend and colleague, Leif Anderson, formerly our chief information officer, who has taken up his new role over the past several years in ways that align eerily with this article – that I had not returned to for ten years. As the authors conclude – and I would concur – organizational leaders “are recognizing the ever-changing nature of strategy development and execution, the ever-compressed time frames they have in which to achieve results – and the ever-growing value of having trusted, in-house strategy executive at the ready.”

>>Jane Addams redux<<

New York Times columnist David Brooks argues for “The Jane Addams Model” for our 21st century lives (April 25, 2017) and I couldn’t agree more!

As Brooks says, “These days everything puts me in mind of Jane Addams. Many of the social problems we face today – the fraying social fabric, widening inequality, anxieties over immigration, concentrated poverty, the return of cartoonish hyper-masculinity – are the same problems she faced 130 years ago.” And she responded in ways we might seek to emulate.

She settled alongside fellow citizens in an urban neighborhood, living and working in reciprocity with neighbors of diverse experiences and backgrounds, bridging social chasms and promoting understanding others.

She believed in character before intellect, that spiritual support is as important as material support. Addams worked from the specific case to the general philosophy. Her antipoverty efforts were intensely personalistic, rather than bureaucratic and systematized. She was both theorist and practitioner. She saw the needs of her neighbors, worked with them to respond, and then used that experience to propose social policies that served the needs of the wider society.

Channeling the late Jean Bethke Elshtain, who wrote a biography of Addams, Brooks points out that Addams believed people are shaped by “dense intimate connections,” what she called “familial contexts.”

As Brooks concludes: “Tough, Addams believed that we only make our way in the world through discipline and self-control. Tender, she created an institution that was a lived-out version of humanist philosophy.” Tough and tender, surely a role model for our times.

PRACTICE THIS

>>A leadership user’s manual<<

I heard an intriguing presentation at a New York Times higher education summit earlier this spring about the power of creating your own leader user manual. The idea is that leaders who know themselves well can articulate their own style and preferences into a one-page user guide that lets others know just how they tick.

There are caveats. The accuracy of the user manual is dependent on the leader’s level of self-awareness and candor. It takes wisdom and humility – including what we learn from other instruments such as “Strength-Finder” or Myers Briggs – to put together a guide that is genuinely accurate and helpful. The worst-case scenario is self-delusion, potentially leading others astray.

To create your own user’s guide, consider these prompt questions:

- What I value most...(for example, speedy work or deliberate work)
- My preferred communication style is...(for example, bit of chit chat or straight into it)
- What gives me the greatest enjoyment at work is...
- What frustrates me most at work is...
- How I prefer to deal with conflict is...
- If I haven’t delivered to your expectation, the best thing to do is...
- The relevant experience I bring to the team is...
- My strengths are...
- My weaknesses are...

As an exercise at a retreat, for example, the team leader might go first and encourage others to answer and share their responses. We’re using the exercise this summer at my leadership team retreat – I’ll let you know how it goes!

>>Institutions at risk<<

As long-time readers of these Notes know, I am an institutional kind of guy. I believe deeply in the power of people working together in democratic institutions to pursue important causes and values. I also know that institutions can be unhealthy and dysfunctional, but I would contend that our democracy depends on our continuing efforts to sustain effective and healthy institutions. That is a particular challenge at the moment, as many commentators have noted.

In a recent issue of *The Christian Century* (June 21, 2017), publisher Peter Marty comments that “(I)nstitutions thrive on adherence to unwritten rules. They depend on people speaking and acting with fairness, respect for others, accountability, transparency, and honesty in a host of ways that cannot be codified.” This makes institutions particularly vulnerable.

Theologian Gary Dorrien, reviewing Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (Penguin Crown, 2017) in the same issue, points to Snyder's contention that institutions are diminished when leaders: "are openly hostile to empirical reality," "repeat...crude smears and slogans" against enemies, "exalt...feelings over reason," and "misplace...faith, as in 'I alone can solve it.'" Sound familiar?

Dorrien points to what he sees as the most critical of Snyder's lessons for our times:

- Do not obey in advance – gather facts, be sure that obedience is warranted.
- Defend institutions – they are not self-protecting, they require our efforts to defend them.

In that spirit, Marty concludes: "Democracy is built from the ground up. Each of us has the power to reaffirm in our own interactions the norms that govern public life and to insist that our public representatives do the same. Beyond that, each of us can also build up the various institutions in which we participate...by doing the everyday things that foster trust and respect for one another. We help the institutions we value to flourish by exemplifying these norms and encouraging others to do the same." May it be so!

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

Two important books for our celebration of July 4th: Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (Liveright Publishing, 2014) takes us back to the source document and points out what we may have forgotten. And Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (U. of North Carolina Press, 2009) tells the compelling story of the woman who helped fuel the civil rights movement with her commitment to education for citizenship.

Graduate school colleague and University of Chicago professor Richard B. Miller expands our understanding of religious ethics in his powerful *Friends and Other Strangers: Studies in Religion, Ethics and Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

In another volume owing to the continuing (and important) focus on the theological concept of vocation (supported generously by the Lilly Endowment), John Neafsey has penned a helpful guide entitled *Act Justly, Love Tenderly: Lifelong Lessons in Conscience and Calling* (Orbis Books, 2016).

>>Anthem<<

The late Leonard Cohen's iconic "Anthem" seems a fitting word for our tumultuous times, reminding us that in our brokenness, there is light, the sacred, redemption even.

"The birds they sang
At the break of day
Start again
I heard them say
Don't dwell on what
Has passed away

Or what is yet to be
Yeah the wars they will
Be fought again
The holy dove
She will be caught again
Bought and sold
And bought again
The dove is never free

Ring the bells (ring the bells) that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in

We asked for signs
The signs were sent
The birth betrayed
The marriage spent
Yeah the widowhood
Of every government
Signs for all to see
I can't run no more
With that lawless crowd
While the killers in high places
Say their prayers out loud
But they've summoned, they've summoned up
A thundercloud
And they're going to hear from me

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in

You can add up the parts
You won't have the sum
You can strike up the march
There is no drum
Every heart, every heart to love will come
But like a refugee

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)
That's how the light gets in
Ring the bells that still can ring (ring the bells that still can ring)
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything (there is a crack in everything)

That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in”

Songwriter: Leonard Cohen
Anthem lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Citizenship and work
- Semper Reformanda

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