

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seven, Number One (October 2005)

"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Not much chatter out there since the last issue of Notes. We start our seventh year of these Notes with a couple of notes of gratitude for expanding our *vocabulary*.

John Laabs, former student and president of the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Foundation, writes "I have finally gotten around to reading your latest Notes for the Reflective Practitioner and want to especially note that I enjoyed very much your words and commencement address quotes on the idea of "common work". As I get closer and closer to devoting more of my time to the business of the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association Foundation and less and less of it on trade association matters, I find the "common work" concept something that can drive me. I have most often expressed it in terms of "what we can do together is disproportionately more than we can do alone", or, in someone else's simpler adage, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". I appreciate your giving my inner thoughts a moniker which is truly fitting philanthropic work." Sometimes the words we use truly do make a difference to our work.

Faithful reader Julie Alfred, now of Anchorage, lifts up a similar theme: "My daughter is in the 10th grade at an exceptional optional secondary school, Steller, here in Anchorage. As we move through a very ambitious strategic planning process (involving students, parents and teachers), I will share your thoughts about the real work of educating students--this must come to apply to students not just at our colleges and universities but in our elementary and secondary schools, too. This certainly is the mission (though not articulated often or loudly enough) of my daughter's school. Thanks for some great language."

It was especially fun to receive this kind note from Neil Baldwin, whose book was the focus of a thread in the last issue of Notes. He writes "Dear Dr. Pribbenow - I am thrilled to read your intellectual and spiritual ruminations on THE AMERICAN REVELATION! Thank you so much for devoting such careful attention to my work. Of course I am especially proud of Jane Addams." You never know who will join in our reflective practice conversations!

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. The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Between the real and the ideal – ethics as reflective practice<<

I had the great privilege earlier this fall to respond to Robert Payton's "Ethics and Civil Society" as part of the Association of Fundraising Professionals Think Tank on Fundraising Research. Bob's paper was insightful as usual and raised up for all of us the tension we all know in our work as fundraisers (and by extension for all professions) between our ideals and the reality of daily experience. My remarks offered the opportunity to draw together some of my own thoughts about ethics in the professions.

"I offer my sincere thanks to Bob Payton for all he has taught many of us about philanthropy and democracy. Bob always points us to the abiding and classic issues in our work and lives. One of my favorite Paytonisms is his pocket card listing the classic virtues and vices, which he is quick to share with his students and other interested parties as a reminder that we are not in this alone, and that we do not need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to ethical reflection--but that we do need to know our history!

In his paper, Bob has, once again, placed a fundamental question square in front of us as we begin this gathering focused on the moral issues of philanthropic fundraising. It is a question that professions in the American context have faced time and again in their evolution. It is the tension between the social compact for professions, the ideal aspirations of professional work vs. the economic and expertise side of professions, the reality of life in the trenches. And Bob's point is that our ethical reflection and decision-making must explore and address both the ideal and the real!

In a sense, Bob's posing of this tension between the ideal and real comes with a bit of a *mea culpa* that I think deserves attention as well as we move forward in efforts to fashion an ever more compelling conceptual and practice framework for ethics in philanthropic work. Those of us who have had the privilege to have feet in both camps (the academy and the workplace) have long felt the need to bridge the gap – and I believe that gatherings like this Think-Tank offer us all a forum in which to faithfully deliberate on how we can bring the real and the ideal into an integrated whole. Bob admits that he has not always paid enough attention to the "real" of fundraising, while focusing on our ideal obligations. But he understands that this is not good enough for our ethics and thus, he offers us a challenge for our deliberations here.

I think this tension between real and ideal is important on many levels, but in particular because it has genuine implications for our ethics and our moral decisions. Simply put, a

focus on bold ideals often leaves us with vacuous principles untethered to the reality of our daily work, while a focus on the cold technique and “dull” work of fundraising leads to a set of transactional rules and guidelines, devoid of a sense of context, often interpreted simply as an easy application of the code to ethical dilemmas. We will not resolve this tension but we must understand it and look for ways to develop a framework for the ethics of philanthropic fundraising that links the real and ideal in an integrated whole – allowing the tension, if you will, to define our character and our actions.

In this way, philanthropic fundraising is by no means unique among American professions – the tension between the social compact and technical expertise is at the heart of the professional adventure in our society, but fundraising may have an advantage because of its relative maturity (or lack thereof!) and the opportunity we all have to get it right – and that I take as my life’s work!

The challenge Bob leaves us with is that once the tension is identified, what shall we do as a profession and as professionals to navigate the tension, to move toward an integrating framework for ethics in our profession? I want to suggest three linked themes that I believe may help us begin to define this framework.

The first theme is the most important because it situates the work of philanthropic fundraising in relation to its highest and noblest cause: philanthropy is a public practice in a healthy democracy (cf. Robert Bellah and William Sullivan’s work on professions and public practice; also, Payton himself on defining philanthropy). Philanthropy is the “impulse to generosity” at the heart of the American character (cf. Gaudiani’s *The Greatest Good*). Like other professions, our work is first and foremost possible because it serves the public trust, public needs, and public goods. This understanding of philanthropy raises up issues of loyalties and priorities in our lives in a way that I find provocative and intriguing. It also points to the sorts of roles we must play not only in pursuit of our professional work, but in our need to be teachers and leaders in public discourse and in encouraging civic reflection.

This notion of philanthropy as a public practice also demands that we understand that philanthropy itself cannot be “ghettoized” in a sector. How we love each other takes many forms and demands ongoing refashioning. In this sense, I look to the work of Jane Addams and her “humane” philanthropy as a metaphor for philanthropy as common, political work – genuinely a public practice.

The second theme of our moral framework is the notion of philanthropic fundraising as a vocation or calling. If we serve a public good, then we are all public servants. A vocation, as Frederick Buechner reminds us, is that place where our deep gladness intersects with the world’s deep need. The ethical implications of this notion are significant because it points to our character (as a profession and as professionals) and the need to think as much about virtues and vices as we do about rules and consequences. Too much of professional ethics today is driven by responses to ethical dilemmas rather than deliberation about the sort of people we are, the character we exhibit and practice. Ethics is about much more than the problems we face; it also is about the riches of human

life and experience. As professionals, we need to embrace moral reflection about the good we accomplish in our work and how that good is linked to the sorts of people we want to be.

This notion of profession as calling also lifts up interesting issues about how our professional calling fits with the mission of the organizations we serve. There needs to be an ongoing dialogue between personal calling and institutional values, looking for ways in which professional commitments and values are honored in organizational mission and practices. This, it seems to me, is the proper understanding of the work of stewardship!

The final theme then directs our attention to how ethics and ethical decision-making must be reflective practice. If we have this larger framework for our work, we are pushed beyond the transactional and dilemma-oriented focus of a technical approach toward a genuine dialogue between theory and practice, between character and rules, between social and historical context and the circumstances of our daily work. It is helpful in this regard to recall another Paytonism: the need for all of us to articulate our philanthropic autobiography, linking moral reflection to our own life experiences!

There are several important components to this understanding of ethics as reflective practice. First, ethical decision-making must be conversational and dialogic. For example, Marilyn Fischer's decision-making framework for fundraising ethics demands that we consider public, organizational, professional and personal perspectives on a given situation. This not easy for many folks, either as individuals or in their roles in organizations. In the latter case, the work of Independent Sector is helpful as organizations develop more deliberative processes for ethical decision-making, becoming more reflective as practitioners within organizations. Second, we also must see how our work is educational and pedagogical. Michael O'Neill is right to challenge us with the notion of fundraisers as moral teachers – teachers about values within our organizations, with donors, and in the wider public.

I close these remarks with genuine thanks for Bob's wise words and with a renewed challenge to all of us to refine a framework for thinking anew about ethics in our profession. We have the opportunity to model for the rest of society how a profession can integrate the ideal and real in its self-understanding and ethics, and in that way point to our critical role in sustaining American democracy--any citizen's highest calling!"

>>A commonplace on politics<<

I have been reading a good bit lately of a lament that we have lost a sense of what genuine political work means, which necessarily begs the question of how we understand politics. A quick romp through the ages offers us much food for thought as we reinvent politics and political work in the 21st century. Enjoy.

“To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.” (Confucius)

The price of apathy towards public affairs is to be ruled by evil men. (Plato)

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, or perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. (Niccolo Machiavelli)

There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty. (John Adams)

Nearly all men can withstand adversity; if you want to test a man's character, give him power. (Abraham Lincoln)

The political and commercial morals of the United States are not merely food for laughter, they are an entire banquet. (Mark Twain)

Some men see things as they are and say, "Why?" I dream of things that never were and say, "Why not?" (George Bernard Shaw)

In our age there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics." All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. (George Orwell)

Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion is. (M. Gandhi)

Poetry is about the grief. Politics is about the grievance. (Robert Frost)

My creed is that public service must be more than doing a job efficiently and honestly. It must be a complete dedication to the people and to the nation with full recognition that every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration, that constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought, that smears are not only to be expected but fought, that honor is to be earned, not bought. (Margaret Chase Smith)

The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world. (Jimmy Carter)

The citizen can bring our political and governmental institutions back to life, make them responsive and accountable, and keep them honest. No one else can. (John Gardner)

Genuine politics -- even politics worthy of the name -- the only politics I am willing to devote myself to -- is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community and serving those who will come after us. Its deepest roots are moral because it is a responsibility expressed through action, to and for the whole. (Vaclav Havel)

PRACTICE THIS

>>Keeping our focus in the electronic din<<

Christopher Percy Collier offers these helpful “five things” to help you be heard above the electronic din in the October 2005 issue of *Fast Company*. Just another way of talking about paying attention...

- (1) Match the medium to the message. Don't use email or the web to communicate something that should be done face-to-face. Simple advice, but I can't tell you how many times I need to remind students of just this point.
- (2) Be obsessively on message. Too many different messages, as important as they may be, will be lost on our over-stimulated world. Stay focused with a core message that helps other focus and see how it all fits together.
- (3) Authenticity matters more than ever. It's about honesty, genuine and sincere communication, a willingness to let others in.
- (4) Live by the Blackberry, die by it. Collier says if you spend more than five minutes on an email, make it a phone call and follow up with a short email. Email makes you dumb as it distracts you from what is truly important.
- (5) Rev up a dashboard. Find a way to filter the mountains of data into the most important facts and trends. Develop a personal dashboard that helps you focus on metrics, issues, and trends that help you sort information and make wise decisions.

>>The art of philanthropy<<

In another of the “classic” Notes excerpts (Notes, 2:3), I return to this wonderful list of provocative, but oh so concrete and on target, ways to practice philanthropy.

“The Utne Reader” (September/October 2000)—a sometimes edgy journal of the alternative press—recently reprinted this provocative list of 15 ways to practice the art of philanthropy, originally proposed by William Wimsatt in his “No More Prisons” (Soft Skull, 1999).

- You don't need to be rich to be a philanthropist.
- Spread love—giving away money is not enough.
- Seek our originality and imagination.
- Support unpopular truths.
- Fund players with a long view.
- Look out of the loop and under the radar.
- Be effective and cost-effective.
- Fund passion.
- Invest in self-help.
- Attack root causes.
- Fund doers, not grant writers.

- Foster combinationism.
- Go for net gains.
- Pay operating expenses.
- Trust what inspires you.

No matter which side of the philanthropic ledger you occupy, you might find here artful lessons, good reminders, provocative challenges for a lifetime of loving humankind.

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

A book many of us have long awaited is *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2005) by Louise W. Knight, a long-time friend. It is a beautiful book in many ways – content, writing, argument – made even more so by the fact that the cover portrait of Jane Addams is the painting that hangs over my desk here at Rockford College. Very cool!

Rockford College is hosting Margaret J. Wheatley early in 2006 for a community workshop and thus I have been drawn back into her important work on organizational behavior, leadership and the importance of conversation. I commend to all of you *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (Berrett-Koehler, 2002).

>>Hope<<

We've had a tough couple of months here at the college, struggling with financial woes and cultural shifts. In the midst of such times, I am reminded that we are people of hope – and that enables me (and us) to go on. Here is a wonderful poem by Lisel Mueller celebrating that truth.

HOPE

It hovers in dark corners
 before the lights are turned on
 it shakes sleep from its eyes
 and drops from mushroom gills,
 it explodes in the starry heads
 of dandelions turned sages,
 it sticks to the wings of green angels
 that sail from the tops of maples.

It sprouts in each occluded eye
 of the many-eyed potato,

it lives in each earthworm segment
surviving cruelty,
 it is the motion that runs
 from the eyes to the tail of a dog,
 it is the mouth that inflates the lungs
 of the child that has just been born.

It is the singular gift
we cannot destroy in ourselves,
the argument that refutes death,
the genius that invents the future,
all we know of God.

It is the serum that makes us swear
not to betray one another,
it is in this poem, trying to speak.

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>>Topics for the next issue (December 2005)<<

- Talking about religion (or not)
- Diversity and citizenship
- Asset mapping

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