

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seven, Number Five (June 2006)

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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

Summer greetings. The moving truck is about to pull up as I finish this last issue of Notes from my vantage point in Rockford. There likely will be a change in the listserv for Notes before the August issue. In the mean time, please contact me at my Augsburg College email address (augpres@augsborg.edu). Several of you have inquired as to whether or not I will continue to send these bi-monthly reflections and for now the answer is definitely yes – these are a valuable exercise for my mind and heart, and I can't imagine stepping back from the community of friends and colleagues who find these Notes helpful.

Former Indiana colleague, Jeff Lozer, an attorney specializing in nonprofit law, sent along this link to an interesting article from the BBC about American philanthropy - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4756363.stm>. It sometimes is helpful to be reminded how distinctive the impulse to generosity is in America – witness the remarkable story of Warren Buffett and the Gates Foundation. I've found the public reflection about Buffett's plan – with contributions by several of those on the Notes list – a wonderful opportunity to make connections between the history of philanthropy in our country, the state of democratic capitalism, and the claims of global citizenship. What do you think? Maybe I can compile some of your thoughts on the Buffett gift in a future issue of Notes.

I also received this good comment from long-time subscriber, Tom Byrne, who leads staff development for Intervarsity: "Your comments this month on professional disciplines (Notes, 7:4) reminded me of a phrase that changed my professional life 20 years ago as I was writing a dissertation. It came from (Laurent) Daloz's wonderful book Effective Teaching and Mentoring (1986), page 27. When I went looking for the reference today, it only took a few moments to find it -- I had memorized it when I first read it. He is talking about the importance of meaning, and how the educational processes we embrace are filled with new meaning and reframing old meaning -- often in radical ways. Nothing is often essentially different, yet all is seen differently. His phrase was: "In that change of perspective, in the transformation of meaning lies the meaning of transformation."

That one phrase led me to building reflective time into my professional world on a regular basis during which I gave myself permission to just think about issues of life,

professional activity, competence, and rest. It revolutionized the way I spent most of the rest of my time, and I went from living under the tyranny of the urgent to working on the really important issues. It led me to developing my own set of professional disciplines that were a mirror of the spiritual disciplines I already understood.” What a wonderful example of the link between reflective practice and paying attention – thanks, Tom.

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

>>Thinking about religion and higher education<<

I have been thinking a good bit lately about my move to a college with a strong link to the Lutheran faith tradition. I have spent my entire professional career in non-sectarian colleges and universities – perhaps I’ve been a missionary on assignment! And now as I embrace my new role as leader of a church college, I wonder what lessons I have learned from my missionary work that will be valuable in helping Augsburg (and its sister institutions) to think more expansively about the role of faith in higher education.

There will be plenty of time for reflections on that question in the years to come, but for now I lift up a few items that have crossed my desk in the past few months that have offered valuable ideas for my consideration.

First, an article in the Spring 2006 issue of *American Scholar* by Marilynne Robinson, whose novel, *Gilead*, won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for its insightful depiction of a life of faith. Robinson’s article, entitled “Onward, Christian Liberals,” addresses the issue of personal holiness and its relation to politics and economics. Her basic critical point – aimed primarily at the liberal Protestant tradition – is summed up in Emily Dickinson’s line – “The abdication of belief / Makes the behavior small”. In other words, Robinson argues that there is an inextricable link that has been lost in the Protestant theological tradition between the holiness of the human and the well-being of the entire creation. Our behavior is small because we have given up the claim that faith makes upon us. We have lost sight of the “mystical/ethical engagement with the world that fuses truth and love and opens experience on a light so bright it expunges every mean distinction.” This is the claim of faith that demands a “posture of grace, generosity, liberality.” And this is the posture by which “our poor and orphaned and our strangers can be sustained in real freedom, and graciously, as God requires.”

I find a similar message in Wendell Berry's "The burden of the Gospels" (*Christian Century*, September 20, 2005), where he writes of his "unconfident faith," his lack of confidence (not of faith) in his ability to do what the Gospels demand of him. Two questions frame Berry's argument: (1) If you had been living in Jesus' time and had heard him teaching, would you have been one of his followers? and (2) Can you be sure that you would keep his commandments if it became excruciatingly painful to do so? I'll leave Robinson's and Berry's provocative claims right there for our mutual reflection.

The final words on the links between religion and higher education come from a declaration crafted at a Wingspread Conference on religion, public life and higher education, organized by the Society for Values in Higher Education. These words point beyond a particular faith tradition to the claims on the academy to prepare students for a pluralistic religious world. The declaration asks three sets of questions:

Religious literacy

What do graduates need to know about religion in a diverse democracy and global society?

How well are we educating students for a religiously pluralistic democracy?

Standards of Intellectual Inquiry, Reason and Academic Freedom

How do academics preserve standards of intellectual inquiry, public reason and academic freedom when faced with religiously grounded assertions?

How can the classroom be open to religious insights without promoting or denigrating specific religious beliefs?

What are the ground rules for civic discourse on matters of religion and public life?

How do we encourage civility, candor and diversity of perspectives through our educational programs?

Students Seeking Purpose and Spiritual Meaning

What is the responsibility of colleges and universities to respond to growing spiritual concerns among students?

To the extent that a college or university enables students' search for purpose or spiritual quest, how does it simultaneously hold to standards of intellectual inquiry and academic excellence?

If an institution's mission includes a commitment to educating students for personal and social responsibility, is a spiritual framework an appropriate template for student development?

Here, then, is the broad framework in which this “missionary” heads back to his “faith home,” with a charge to negotiate the inevitable messiness of the intersection of deeply held faith commitments, a vital democracy and the claims of a liberal education. How both daunting and energizing!

>>Transitions redux<<

I first wrote the following essay when I moved from Chicago to Wabash College in 1996. I then included it in these Notes (2:4) when I prepared to leave Indiana and look for a presidency in 2001. Though it specifically focuses on the transitions of philanthropic fundraisers, I think it has relevance for all us, stands the test of time, and is most appropriate for my imminent move from Rockford College to Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

“My upcoming move to a new professional position has given me the occasion to reflect upon the moral dynamics of such transitions. What are the values at play when you choose to leave one position and assume another? Whose values are most important in that move? Are there professional ethical issues that we must be aware of as we make a move? What do we owe the broader philanthropic community during a professional transition?

It strikes me that the ethics of job transitions are an important issue for our profession, especially at a moment when uninformed public scrutiny threatens to undercut the fine work being done by thousands of devoted, skilled philanthropic fundraisers. We need to take every opportunity to show that fundraisers have thought about the moral issues raised by our comings and goings.

One of the most effective ways to change such perceptions is to forge public conversations about the nature of our work and its role in a democratic society. Such conversations are possible only after we, as individual professionals and as a professional community, have made the effort to be reflective about the ethics of coming and going.

Allow me to offer a simple framework for our reflections on the moral dynamics of professional transitions. I would suggest that the ethics of coming and going must be considered in relation to four audiences. When making a professional transition, what moral consideration do we owe?:

1. to ourselves
2. to our organizations (both old and new)
3. to our professional colleagues
4. to the public

1. To ourselves

Professional transition is a time of sometimes conflicting thoughts and feelings. It can be a "heady" time, full of confidence and celebration of our accomplishments. It also may be a time of escape, a time when we are able to get away from the stress and the ordinary nature of an old situation and look forward to the freedom of the new. It is a time of uncertainty. Will I be successful in my new job? Did I do as well in the old job as I could? What will people think of me—both as I leave this job and as I move into a new position?

All of the issues raised for us by professional transitions are natural and healthy. There is much to learn about ourselves during these life moments if we are willing to take the time and think through what it means to make a professional transition, about our various motivations in making a move, about the health of relationships forged and to be forged, about the legacy we leave behind, about the information entrusted to us, and about the trust we must respect and sustain.

This is a challenge to the busy, preoccupied professional. Make self-reflection about your professional transitions a priority. Think about where you are going and why, and consider the implications of your move for those who work and live with you. Don't be afraid to name your legacy, even if it's not everything you think it should be. Face the perceptions of your move among those you work with, your professional colleagues and the broader public.

Celebration may well be in order as you prepare for a transition. Even celebration, however, deserves to be grounded in a sense of integrity. Self-reflection is the key.

2. To our organizations

One of the central dynamics of any professional transition is the pull we experience between the needs and interests of the organization we are leaving and those of the one to which we are going. Most of the ethical principles in our fundraising codes related to transitions address this tension in our experience. We have information and relationships forged in one institution—and we all know that information and relationships are at the core of our work. Now we are going to another institution. What goes with us? The ethical codes are fairly clear about this: we must be careful not to violate the trust of one organization and its constituents for the gain of another.

I would suggest that a more helpful way to think about the pull we experience between organizations is to consider the claims of balancing honest and loyalty. Consider a few practical issues. As you leave an organization, how do you help to chart a constructive future path for its fundraising efforts while at the same time offering an honest assessment of its capacity? How do you avoid the "lame-duck" mentality that too often leads us to avoid constructive recommendations based on our experience?

As we come into an organization the "honey-moon" period is full of chances to make changes, to build up or tear down relationships, to offer up quick solutions to problems that may require long-term thinking. People will look to us for a vision, for our expertise,

for our opinions. We will be tempted to make choices that make us look good. What is the loyal thing to do, the honest thing to do? What should we do?

How do we respond to these complex dynamics? There is no easy answer—and that is precisely the point. The tension between loyalty and honesty is a very real one, and we must recognize and accept the tension, while we make real-life moral decisions that have implications for us, for our organizations, and for the people they serve.

3. To our profession

Another key dynamic in professional transitions involves our obligations to our professional colleagues and the professional community. We know the temptations. There are many comparisons in the fundraising world. We compare results, styles, management abilities, techniques, and so forth. As we move into a new position, we have the opportunity to serve or to do a disservice to our professional colleagues in several ways.

For example, do we leave behind a legacy of trust and planning and infrastructure that gives our successor the opportunity to make things even better for the organization? Or do we leave behind a legacy of deception and personal (rather than institutional) relationships that set a difficult context for those who follow us? In our new organization, do we honor the work of our predecessor, or do we use his/her experience as the scapegoat for our success? Within the professional community, do we participate in the gossip-mongering and abuse of trust that too often pervades our gatherings? Or do we seek to understand the variety of styles and experiences that make up our community?

I would suggest that a guiding moral principle for an attitude toward our profession and professional colleagues in the context of transition might best be termed, fidelity. I do not mean an uncritical loyalty to everyone who calls him or herself a fundraiser; I do not mean we should overlook incompetence or irresponsibility.

I do believe we have an obligation, particularly in transitions to help each other and our organizations and constituencies to be more constructive, to be informed advocates of philanthropy in our democracy. In that context the strengths and weaknesses of individual colleagues are to be taken seriously as part of the diversity and complexity of our work. When done in the service of organizational mission, our responses to colleagues are truly faithful. When done in pursuit of our own success and personal gain, our responses undercut the foundation of public trust in philanthropy.

4. To the public

In the end, I believe that the central moral claim we face in professional transitions is to focus on trust-building among the various publics we serve. How have our behavior, our attitudes, our legacy, and our public engagement in the midst of our transition, helped to build public trust? How have we practiced civility in our professional transition?

Trust, of course, is at the core of healthy organizations and society. Civility refers to the sort of responsible practices and actions required of all who live and work in organizations and society. To be civil is not simply to practice good etiquette, (though it is a start). It also is not uncritical tolerance in the name of avoiding conflict. True civility is about trust-building among fellow citizens, about making our agencies and society more humane, and about encouraging through our every action an understanding of the deeply-held values and commitments that bind us together.

How have you and I helped to build public trust in our professional transitions? How do we practice civility in our comings and goings? Have we even asked the questions of ourselves and each other? That is where we must begin.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>The myth of balance: toward a centered life<<

I am struck by the number of articles in such business-oriented magazines as *Harvard Business Review* and *Fast Company* that regularly focus attention on the conflicting demands of work and personal life. I happened upon an article from the November-December 1998 issue of *HBR*, for example, entitled “Work and Life: The End of the Zero-Sum Game,” in which the authors suggest three principles for a more healthy integration of the various demands of work and life:

- Clarify what is important
- Recognize and support the whole person
- Continually experiment with the way work is done

There is much of value in the article for practicing this sort of integration or balancing of demands. Recently, however, I was introduced to the work of Jack Fortin, who directs something called The Centered Life Initiative at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. His new book, *The Centered Life* (Augsburg Fortress, 2006), has offered me a helpful framework for thinking about what he calls the “myth of the balanced life” and the need to embrace a life that has a center – in that sense, a focal point for helping to understand and embrace how all of the pieces of my life fit together in a calling or vocation.

Fortin’s admittedly theological argument is worth careful study, even if from a diverse perspective of what gives your life meaning. He suggests a fourfold process – not meant to be linear but evocative of the cycles of personal growth. We are awakened to God’s presence in our life. We are called to live our faith in every concrete situation and relationship. We are set free to contribute our unique gifts to God’s work in the world. We are nurtured and supported by a community of faith.

I commend Fortin's book to you – I read it in one evening. This is about paying attention, attending to what is truly meaningful, what is genuinely at the center of our personal and common lives.

>>Value-driven management<<

As I move to a new leadership position, one of the challenges I face is how to articulate the value proposition of an institution that I am just beginning to know and understand. A recent article in *University Business* (June 2006), "Value Added: A new framework for university leadership and management," focuses my attention on being able to describe how a college creates value through its various outcomes. There is much to commend in this "new" framework.

The focus on outcomes and value creation, the authors argue, has the potential to be a catalyst for rethinking and configuring the core elements of the traditional academic model. It also promotes sustainability and provides a basis for institutional differentiation and competitive advantage. What is our institution's particular value proposition and how do we prove it? It is about accountability, responsible and imaginative deployment of limited resources, and a sense of common work dedicated to sustaining the value of mission and vision.

Institutional change that does not focus on value creation will suffer from misalignment between institutional purpose and the agendas of other stakeholders (faculty, students, and the wider public). It will lead to resistance in mobilizing and leveraging resources that help create value. It may lead to cutbacks in programs rather than imaginative deployment of resources to do what the college does best. It ultimately also leads to financial hardships for the institution and its graduates as costs escalate, while value languishes – and that makes no one happy!

My focus on value in the days and months ahead at Augsburg will be threefold:

- What is the nature and quality of the outcomes for our students?
- What is the essence of the experiences through which the outcomes are achieved?
- What does it cost, what is it worth, and how can we deploy resources more responsibly and imaginatively to create the most value?

I'll keep you informed as my new assignment unfolds!

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I've just received a copy of a delightful book edited by Sam Intrator and Megan Scribner, *Teaching With Fire: Poetry that Sustains the Courage to Teach* (Jossey-Bass, 2003). It includes poems chosen by educators, along with commentary on why the poem has special meaning for their teaching and learning.

I don't always read *Harper's Magazine*, but on an airplane earlier this spring I found in the April 2006 issue an article entitled "The Spirit of Disobedience: An invitation to resistance," by Curtis White, a professor at Illinois State University. He argues that "We need to work inventively – as Christ did, as Thoreau did – in the spirit of disobedience for the purpose of refusing the social order into which we happen to have been born and putting in its place a culture of life-giving things."

My good Rockford colleague, Stephanie Quinn, recently shared with me an elegant volume of reflections on classical texts entitled *Classical Considerations: Useful Wisdom from Greece and Rome* (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2006). A wonderful collection of notes from reflective practitioners, including a wise piece from Dr. Quinn herself on "The Power of Words."

>>Blessings<<

I feel the blessings of this transition in my life and offer this whimsical tribute to the ways in which the world may surprise us!

"Blessings" by Ronald Wallace from *Long for This World: New and Selected Poems*. © University of Pittsburgh Press.

Blessings

occur.
Some days I find myself
putting my foot in
the same stream twice;
leading a horse to water
and making him drink.
I have a clue.
I can see the forest
for the trees.

All around me people
are making silk purses
out of sows' ears,
getting blood from turnips,
building Rome in a day.
There's a business
like show business.
There's something new

under the sun.

Some days misery
no longer loves company;
it puts itself out of its.
There's rest for the weary.
There's turning back.
There are guarantees.
I can be serious.
I can mean that.
You can quite
put your finger on it.

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>>Topics for the next issue (August 2006)<<

- Higher education and paying attention
- Do we need another hero (or heroine)?
- The moral biography of wealth

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