NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

Volume Seven, Number Six (August 2006)

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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<<

Here we are at that wonderful moment just as (or just before) school begins again. This is my 31st consecutive fall on a college campus – you have to love it! The family and I are enjoying settling into our new environs here in Minneapolis and at Augsburg College. It is a good place and we are very happy to be here. We have made the transition with Notes to the Augsburg listserv, which I trust has been fairly seamless for all of you. My deep thanks to all of you who wrote wishing us well in our new adventure – I am grateful for your consideration and support.

I owe an apology to longtime subscriber Tom Boyle, whose words I quoted in the June 2006 issue of Notes, but whose name I misstated (it is Boyle, not Byrne!) I'm sorry, Tom.

Jeanne Kojis, a new subscriber from Portland, Oregon, writes: "When I Googled your name and newsletter title, the October 2000 issue was at the top of the list. Scanning down it I came across a brief piece on "trust" that reached across my recent experiences of 'betrayal' in two of the primary organizations I have worked with for the last four years. Those few paragraphs took me a couple steps further in my journey of forgiveness." With this kind endorsement, I've included the trust piece from 2000 in this issue of Notes. Welcome, Jeanne.

Faithful subscriber and friend, Gene Scanlan from D.C. wrote with his usual insightful thoughts: "I did want to respond to one of your comments in the June 2006 Notes, particularly your statement that "It sometimes is helpful to be reminded how distinctive the impulse to generosity is in America..." I'm not so sure this is really the case -- maybe the forms it takes here are somewhat different, and maybe the scope of philanthropy is better understood, given our penchant for numbers and statistics (witness baseball, which seems to be becoming an exercise in statistics). But the impulse seems much more universal.

I was recently reminded of this when I had a day to browse through the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and happened upon some small Egyptian plaques, probably about 3,000 years old. They were described as plaques given to donors who had made contributions to a temple to ensure the souls of their deceased relatives would be cared for by the priests. So donor recognition isn't that new, I guess!

We also tend to believe that organized philanthropy is one of the discoveries of American society and one of our great strengths. While I agree with that generally, I have to keep

reminding myself that maybe other cultures have done this before us… [We need to know about] the Muslim custom of establishing Waqfs, or in our terms, permanent endowments, for charitable purposes…Muslim law early in its history established different laws for what we call the nonprofit sector as opposed to the corporate or governmental sectors. I'm no expert on Muslim culture or history, but this is an interesting look at some very old but very organized philanthropy." Gene also forwarded a helpful article on Waqfs (and Jewish ethical wills) from the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook (http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jewish-wills.html).

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.

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REFLECT ON THIS

>>Higher education and paying attention<<

I have written in my Notes regularly of the concept of paying attention and its importance for my understanding of leadership and life in democracy. More and more I also have begun to explore connections between paying attention and reflective practice, and the relevance of the two concepts to the work of higher education.

I was intrigued therefore by an essay by Brad Sullivan, published in October 2005 by the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College (where I once worked) (http://liberalarts.wabash.edu). In his essay entitled "Liberal Arts Education and the Cultivation of Attention," Sullivan recalls a quote from Simone Weil, who said that "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity," and comments himself that a liberal arts education is well-suited to cultivate attention in students – "And *attention*, like listening, engenders genuine and lasting learning."

Sullivan's challenge to all of us who care about education is to consider attention as a topic of focused inquiry. How does paying attention generate and sustain the kind of life we lead? Attention is the means by which we connect our experiences with the life of the mind (think, reflective practice!)

Sullivan's argument is that the epistemology most conducive to the purposes of a liberal arts education – grounded in a historical perspective and having its genesis in personal engagement, inquiry and critical consideration – is inextricably bound up with the cultivation of attention. "Experience-centered, inquiry-centered liberal arts learning helps them to cultivate and practice the kinds of attention that will make them intelligent observers, diligent critics, and thoughtful actors on the stage of human life."

In what specific ways does a liberal arts education encourage all of us "to attend (or to be present) to" what is important? Sullivan suggests several ways worthy of further exploration:

- Attending to a problem or text "means coming back to the work at hand, staying with it, living with it through the good and not-so-good moments" – think about how close textual reading and study pulls us back from the many distractions around us.
- Cultivating attention also leads us to "accompany or wait upon as a companion or servant" – listening well and reading patiently is a gift to others, the basis for forming relationships and a social life.
- Paying attention also means "to take care of" – liberal arts study can lead to good stewardship and responsibility for both ideas and practices. As we learn about historical struggles, for example, we may both understand and seek to be involved in participating in the struggle (for meaning or justice, for example).
- Finally, paying attention means "to apply or direct oneself" – paying attention helps create self-discipline, making sense of subject matter and then applying it to the world around us.

Sullivan's brief essay is wonderfully evocative of the historic purposes of a liberal arts education – the challenge to educate and form responsible citizens of the *polis*. Paying attention, come to learn, is at the heart of both a liberal arts education and a healthy democracy.

>>Do we need heroes of the moral life?<<

I have long found Joseph Badaracco, Jr., to be a wise guide to the ethics of organizational life. Badaracco, who teaches business ethics at the Harvard Business School, writes regularly for the *Harvard Business Review*, where in a September 2001 article he stated provocatively, "We Don't Need Another Hero."

Badaracco's basic premise is that as much as we are drawn to the lives of great moral leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa and Gandhi, what we need more than such heroes or heroines are quiet moral leaders who often sever the connection between morality and public heroism – that is, they work behind the scenes with great patience and careful resolve to right (or prevent) moral wrongs.

This is intriguing stuff. I'm not sure I fully agree with Badaracco – there may be room for the heroic in inspiring and motivating others to personal and social moral action – but there is a great deal that I find persuasive in his argument for ordinary, quiet moral leadership.

Badaracco's conclusion is that those individuals who are most effective in moral leadership have two clear characteristics: (1) they have mixed motives with regard to why they are willing to be a moral leader (i.e., they are not necessarily willing to sacrifice everything to right a wrong – they may also care about their job and their reputation); and (2) they are pragmatic and realistic about the limits of their power and have a degree of modesty about their actions that help them move wisely in "messy" organizational landscapes.

Badaracco suggests several principles for the operating instructions of quiet moral leadership:

- Put things off till tomorrow – quiet leaders often begin to face an ethical dilemma by looking for ways to buy time. The vast majority of ethical challenges are mundane and subtle. Patience and resolve are the best responses. "Strategic stalling" may be in order to allow solutions to evolve organically.
- Pick your battles – quiet leaders use their political capital wisely. Invest your capital prudently, use a bit of humor, and don't always think you need to change the culture n response to every dilemma.
- Bend the rules, don't break them – realize that following the rules rigidly can be a moral cop-out. When a murderer asks you where a potential victim is hiding, it might be all right to lie (with apologies to Kant!) Rules are at their best when they set boundaries in which we navigate, not when they become an end in themselves. This is not to say that it is all right to break the rules – but bending the rules imaginatively is part of effective moral leadership in complex situations.
- Find a compromise – moral principles might legislate against compromise, but effective moral leaders must recognize that the "gray" areas of most ethical situations may require responsible, workable compromises rather than universal solutions. Solutions that are "good enough" – responsible and workable enough – to satisfy the various parties to a moral situation may be just what are required.

I can't help think of Jane Addams when I explore Badaracco's theory of quiet, moral leadership. Addams clearly was inspired by the heroic (witness the chapter on Abraham Lincoln in *Twenty Years at Hull-House)*, but on the other hand it would be possible to interpret much of her work at Hull-House, with its focus on working with her neighbors to meet common needs, very much in line with Badaracco's contentions about effective, pragmatic moral action. I welcome your thoughts.

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PRACTICE THIS

>>Sustainability<<

One of the themes of my early leadership here at Augsburg is focused on what it means to build a sustainable urban environment. We are uniquely situated in a city neighborhood and have a variety of opportunities to explore the interconnectedness of urban life with both human and natural forces. New colleague, Tom Morgan, who teaches leadership and practices what he preaches, has reminded me of Wendell Berry's "17 Rules on Sustainability," which have proven to be most relevant to our reflection and practices. Here is Berry's original speech in which he first posted the rules.

"How can a sustainable local community (which is to say a sustainable local economy) function? I am going to suggest a set of rules that I think such a community would have to follow. I hasten to say that I do not understand these rules as predictions; I am not

interested in foretelling the future. If these rules have any validity, it is because they apply now.

Supposing that the members of a local community wanted their community to cohere, to flourish, and to last, they would:

1. Ask of any proposed change or innovation: What will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?

2. Include local nature -- the land, the water, the air, the native creatures -- within the membership of the community.

3. Ask how local needs might be supplied from local sources, including the mutual help of neighbors.

4. Supply local needs first (and only then think of exporting their products, first to nearby cities, and then to others).

5. Understand the ultimate unsoundness of the industrial doctrine of "labor saving" if that implies poor work, unemployment, or any kind of pollution or contamination.

6. Develop properly scaled value-adding industries for local products in order not to become merely a colony of the national or the global economy.

7. Develop small-scale industries and businesses to support the local farm or forest economy.

8. Strive to produce as much of their own energy as possible.

9. Strive to increase earnings (in whatever form) within the community, and decrease expenditures outside the community.

10. Circulate money within the local economy for as long as possible before paying it out.

11. Invest in the community to maintain its properties, keep it clean (without dirtying some other place), care for its old people, and teach its children.

12. Arrange for the old and the young to take care of one another, eliminating institutionalized "child care" and "homes for the aged." The young must learn from the old, not necessarily and not always in school; the community knows and remembers itself by the association of old and young.

13. Account for costs that are now conventionally hidden or "externalized." Whenever possible they must be debited against monetary income.

14. Look into the possible uses of local currency, community-funded loan programs, systems of barter, and the like.

15. Be aware of the economic value of neighborliness -- as help, insurance, and so on. They must realize that in our time the costs of living are greatly increased by the loss of neighborhood, leaving people to face their calamities alone.

16. Be acquainted with, and complexly connected with, community-minded people in nearby towns and cities.

17. Cultivate urban consumers loyal to local products to build a sustainable rural economy, which will always be more cooperative than competitive."

From a speech delivered November 11, 1994 at the 23rd annual meeting of the Northern Plains Resource Council.

>>Trust me, if you are able<<

This is a piece that originally appeared in Notes 2:1 (October 2000). It seems especially relevant to me as I begin to build trust with my new colleagues at Augsburg.

"I have written here before of the centrality of trust to the well being of communities and organizations. It is such an elusive part of our common lives, but so essential. Sociologist Robert Bellah and his associates write in "The Good Society," (1991, Alfred Knopf) that "Trust…is never to be taken for granted. In our relation to the world, trust is always in conflict with mistrust…(and) if we are dominated by mistrust we cannot attend or interpret adequately, we cannot act accountably, and we will rupture, not strengthen, the solidarity of the community or communities we live in. But how can we trust?" (p. 284)

To this question—and it is the question we must struggle with—the "Harvard Management Update" (Vol. 5, No. 1, September 2000) offers some very concrete suggestions for building trust in organizations.

First, we must be able to describe some of the forms that trust takes in an organization. They suggest three:

- Communication trust (or trust of disclosure), the extent to which employees are willing to share information.
- Contractual trust (or trust of character), employees' faith in one another's integrity and ability to keep agreements; and,
- Competence trust (or trust of capability), employees' respect for one another's abilities.

If these three types of trust are evident in organization—and they can be nurtured—we will begin to build what the authors call "transactional trust," the relationships of trust that undergird healthy and successful organizations.

But once we can describe the individual and organizational forms that trust takes, we are still left with the question of how to build trust when it is not there. The authors point to three key steps—admittedly still a bit sketchy, but we must begin somewhere.

(1) Develop your own capacity for trust first. Learn to depend on yourself, and others will perceive and respond to you as a trustworthy person. If, on the other hand, you do not have the confidence of your abilities or convictions, others may share your lack of trust.
(2) Build trust behaviorally and incrementally. Don't trust too little or too much, without evidence that trust is warranted. Celebrate and reward trustworthy behavior; hold colleagues responsible for untrustworthy actions. Don't expect or put faith in large leaps of trust—trust builds and sustains itself more fully when it happens incrementally.
(3) Tackle betrayal head-on. Mistrust is natural—and sometimes healthy. People will betray us. We will learn more about how to trust if we work through betrayals in a healthy way. Don't deny that it happened, face it and learn from it.

All of us have many trusts to keep—with each other, colleagues, donors, the public. When you experience trust, recognize and celebrate it for it is a gift that all of us must care for. Bellah joins the great Czech playwright and citizen of the world, Vaclav Havel, in challenging us to be "ambassadors of trust in a fearful world." Maybe then we can hope to build a good society!"

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PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

I have a favorite exercise that I use with my senior staff on occasion. I ask them to imagine that we have been asked to teach a leadership course together and each of us is to add one text to the syllabus. The exercise asks each person to justify the text he or she has chosen. I enjoyed the exercise with my new staff at Augsburg – and think that the resulting list of texts is worth your consideration as a primer on leadership:

- The Gospel of Mark 6: 30-44 – the story of the feeding of the 5000, a guide to practicing abundance
- *West's Business Law*, because the law helps us examine how we should live together
- Parker Palmer's *The Active Life* for its glimpses into how contemplation and action cannot be separated
- Parker Palmer again with *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* for its roadmap to vocational journeys
- "The Bridge Builder" a poem by Will Allen Dromgoole that reminds us of our stewardship for future generations
- Jim Collins (of *Good to Great* fame), whose article "Level 5 Leadership: The Triumph of Humility and Fierce Resolve" offers an aspirational framework for organizational leadership
- Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* for its focus on how organizations involve overlapping systems of human activity

- Witold Rybczynksi's *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the 19th Century* for an introduction to Frederick Law Olmsted's patient and wise approach to urban planning (and life)
- Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* because organizational life demands more reflective and systems-focused leaders

>>Whatever happens<<

I'm learning the art of public prayer in my new position at an institution for which prayer is both appropriate and important. Here is an intriguing example.

"Prayer" by Galway Kinnell from *The Past*, Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Prayer

Whatever happens. Whatever
what is is is what
I want. Only that. But that.

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

- I believe – the beginning of wisdom
- Generosity and consideration
- The moral biography of wealth: what we might learn from the Buffett gift