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Catalyst is for alumni of our seminars and workshops to remain connected, and for coaching clients, prospective clients, and other interested parties to learn about who we are and what we do. Also available electronically in *Writings* at www.DancingStar.com

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Diversity – Perspectives from the Field

This is the first of a four-part series.

Ah, diversity. A big issue in today's world. These days, we live, work, and play with people from countries and cultures which for many of us were once vague foreign lands read about in social histories. Today we know people from Kyoto, Trinidad, Croatia, Senegal, Tuscany, Beijing... Many of our loved ones live overseas, some in contentious circumstances. How are we handling it?

Not always well, based on a quick survey of colleagues in the field. The first with whom I spoke was Mai Vu, Leadership Coach and Consultant, who works with companies intent on creating a true leadership culture.

Mai says, *There are two things that I object to about the way diversity is being addressed. First, the conversation tends to revolve around race, usually the black and white races. People tend to compare pain – "my pain is larger than your pain" – and how they have been victimized.*

Second, people tend to focus externally, on how "someone has done it to me." Rarely do I hear someone say, "I found myself discriminating against so and so because she/he is _____, the same behavior and attitude that my parents taught me." Or "here is my list of prejudices that I have against people....."

The diversity conversation will be richer, deeper, and more quiet, if we start to talk about how each of us

contributes to the situation, how unconscious we are, how automatic it is for us to hate, to fear, to separate. Not from a "make wrong" place, but from a place of awareness and acceptance. From there we have a shot at changing ourselves and the situation.

Mai observes that roughly 90% of her prospective clients just want to "fix this diversity problem", until they are shown a different way.

She says, *Diversity is not a problem to be fixed. We need to change our paradigm. If we keep treating it like it's a problem, it will be a problem. It is an opportunity to learn, to expand our mind, our heart, our experience. If we start with the quality of the conversation, shift from a victim or martyr place, away from blame toward curiosity, acceptance, and responsibility, we will remember that beneath all of our differences lies a commonality – our soul. Our soul doesn't have differences. It hungers for one thing, to be loved. We all want that.*

Says Diversity Trainer Judy Tso, *large corporations are trying to deal with diversity on multiple levels, including internally between their employees and externally between the company and its customers. They're trying to build more inclusive cultures, yet there are things people can't talk about or even refer to, like race, gender, sexual preference. More subtle are personality differences, work styles, and work ethic valuations.*

Judy encounters companies in which people judge each other in non-productive ways – managers of peers and direct reports, co-workers of each other. She sees "joking" cultures which entail intense ribbing and joking, to the point of (or as a mask for) hostility. She also sees what she describes as a *troubling corporate policy of "keep the strong, who fit a preferred profile, and fire the rest". At best, those who don't fit don't get any attention, at worst, they're let go. Companies do not want to have to spend time developing those that are not "the best".*

Many company cultures deny the human being, discouraging people from expressing feelings and emotions for fear of being labeled too sensitive, or needy (see next month's issue on *Diversity and Highly Sensitive People*). Yet many companies today also try to do too much with too few people, overloading their "good" people without an outlet for the attendant emotions, asking human beings to be superhuman. This is a key problem cited by "corporate refugees" I've encountered.

We'll explore the connections in more depth next issue. For now, how do you as leader connect with those who are different from you? How do you listen to people who are unfamiliar to hear what they have to offer? What are you modeling, and how effective is it, short- and long-term? – *compiled by Deborah Huisken*

ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

If you or people you know are committed to having an impact in the world, and can use the services of a coach to help you stay on target amid myriad demands, or to subscribe to this newsletter, contact Dancing Star Productions, phone: +1 413.367.9416. Email: info@DancingStar.com, or on the web at www.DancingStar.com.

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart. – Helen Keller



Catalyst – A Dancing Star Production
One must embrace the chaos within to give birth to a dancing star – adapted from Nietzsche

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QUOTES OF NOTE

Arrogance is not a quality of leadership. – bumper sticker

Recruitment and retention of qualified diverse candidates continues to challenge even the most committed [legal] organizations. A specific challenge exists when recruiting younger attorneys of all backgrounds who have different expectations from their predecessors. These attorneys want employers who embrace – not simply tolerate – diversity. – Miriam Bamberger and Heather Bradley, writing for *Diversity & the Bar*

Deb's Corner



And a couple more perspectives on diversity...

From Kerry Sandison, a consultant in South Africa came: *What you have written reminded me of what poet David*

Whyte said at a recent talk – "it is at the edge of ourselves that we create the possibility of meeting and seeing the other."

For me, to be at the edge of myself means stepping into the discomfort of not knowing – and staying with that discomfort in order to meet the one who is truly other. It is at the edge of ourselves that we get a bigger perspective on who we are. This forces me to ask, what does it take for me to step to the edge of myself? The answer is neither easy nor simple if I go behind truisms and apple pie slogans.

The work of diversity, as the work of leadership, includes going within.

Mickey Davidson, an artist and a business person in New York City observes: *Diversity bespeaks variety. Everybody wants to stand fully themselves, yet how do we also give without losing or compromising that self?*

Mickey cites the challenge of allowing *everyone to be their full self, and also decide where and who sets limits so there isn't utter chaos.*

She says, *Effective business people know how to expand beyond themselves. They often have a connection with their heritage, with ancestors, so they know of other ways and traditions even if they don't embrace them.*

First we have to acknowledge it's ok to be different. If we acknowledge

we're different, then we have to learn to be in community and also alone. This is difficult, because we want to feel connected.

Often we don't allow time to establish that connection. And if we've learned to be cautious, that won't change just because an organization says it must. People need time and common activities to connect with each other at deeper levels.

In my work, people come together as individuals with respect for an art form. I look for high integrity, independence, and commitment to that art. We won't allow ourselves to look bad on stage whether or not we like each other. We make our collaboration work because we have personal integrity, and a shared passion for the work. Sometimes chemistry between people just doesn't work. We can still behave as professionals, get the work done, then go our separate ways.

Mickey's point about connection bespeaks the importance of having a strong community, whether it's family of origin or choice, or a gathering of like-minded people. JP Morgan/Chase has picked up on this lesson – they support a wide range of self-forming communities with senior-level oversight through their Corporate Diversity program.

A participant in a recent workshop spoke of searching for her "tribe". We all need a place where we can be met, recognized, and reason things out with people we trust. Then, perhaps, we can meet others with more open hearts.

COACHING RESOURCE CORNER

– A number of reports on Coaching have crossed my desk recently, including *The Executive Coaching Process and Administration at Fortune 100 Companies*, and *Case Study: A new approach to coaching and management at Britvic*. Also, Kenzie Kwong in Hong Kong shared an article she authored entitled *Executive Coaching in Hong Kong*. Email me (deborah@dancingstar.com) if you'd like a copy of any of these reports.

– *Calling all Internal Coaching Program Developers!* The International Coaching Federation (ICF) is conducting a survey of internal people creating coaching programmes inside corporations to capture data on best practise. If this is you or anyone you know, please contact me and I will forward the details so you can take part in the survey.

– **Fast Company** magazine recently published an article by executive coach Marshall Goldsmith about the value of leading by example – including sharing your personal development efforts – to engender success as a leader in the corporate arena. Go to www.fastcompany.com/magazine/80/mgoldsmith.html, and let me know what you think.