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Transformative Leadership and the Unapologetic Leader

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My poem, *I Want an Unapologetic Leader*, indicates a few of the qualities that I associate with transformative leaders – namely, open-mindedness, emotional intelligence, and integrity. Perhaps a transformative leader doesn't need to like art, but some enthusiasm for confusion is necessary. In this age of increasing complexity and uncertainty, a leader must be flexible, ask questions, seek diverse viewpoints, and take risks to respond creatively in changeable circumstances (Montuori, 2010; Giulioni

I Want an Unapologetic Leader

*I want a leader
who likes art, even
the confusing kind*

*I want a leader
who laughs easily
and cries sometimes*

*I want a leader
who is openly intellectual
and speaks of love*

*And most of all
I want a leader
who changes her or his mind
with humility
without apology*

and Hendel-Giller, 2018). The ending of the poem explains the title, but it also speaks to an exceptional quality found in transformative leaders – the courage to change one’s mind.

A transformative leader knows that changing one’s mind is not a weakness to be ashamed of or apologize for, but a result of learning. I want a leader that learns! Transformative leadership involves self-leadership, an ongoing process of reflection and personal development (Montuori and Donnelly, 2017; Anello, Hernandez, and Khadem, 2014). For this reason, transformative learning and transformative leadership are closely linked.

In transformative learning, the “form” that gets transformed is one’s mindset or way of knowing (Kegan, 2009). This change in mind can compel us to change our behavior so it will be in alignment with our new understandings of reality (Ciporen, 2010). Transformative learning is more likely to occur when a leader is willing to engage with the unfamiliar, to consider multiple perspectives, and in other ways risk having their unexamined beliefs exposed (Montuori, 2010; Nagata, 2006; Anello, Hernandez, and Khadem, 2014). John Dirx portrays such openness as “taking our inner lives seriously” (Dirx, Mezirow, and Cranton, 2006, p. 129). Leaders can benefit from giving attention to their inner lives because it calls into question and brings into focus personal authenticity and integrity (Chapman and McClendon, 2018).

The poem’s reference to a leader “who laughs easily and cries sometimes...and speaks of love” relates to the emotional intelligence aspect of a transformative leader’s self-development. Daniel Goleman (2011), informed by affective neural science and social neural science, makes the intriguing argument that leaders who develop their emotional intelligence are better able to create a resonance with those they lead, facilitating a flow state so people can work at their best. In an illuminating hermeneutic inquiry, Satinder Dhiman (2015) turned to the Bhagavad Gītā for insights into the qualities of a wise leader and found that nearly “all of the qualities of an ideal sage more or less focus on emotional maturity – the ability to manage emotional disturbances and reactions calmly” (p. 14). Dhiman (2015) adds that the self-awareness and self-discipline necessary for the emotional intelligence described in the Bhagavad Gītā represent very high moral leadership at the upper limits of human possibilities. Therefore, emotional intelligence indicates an array of capacities which necessitate ongoing reflection, mindfulness, and self-development practices.

Of course, transformative leadership is more than self-development; it is personal growth in service of positive, systemic change. The relationship of inner change to outer change is so profound that “Change yourself. Change the world” is the motto for the Transformative Leadership MA program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. A transformative leader is eager to learn and grow and change her mind, with humility and without apology, in service of the greater good.

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About the Author

Jocelyn Chapman, PhD, is the Director of the Transformative Inquiry Department at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, California. She teaches in the Transformative Leadership online MA program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Her leadership philosophy is founded on the belief that leadership is a process, not a role, involving interaction and communication, reflection, and authentic presence.

Her research interests include systems thinking as a catalyst for personal and social change; learning conversations and aesthetic experiences in online education; and education reform, including reform of teacher thinking. Her first published work was a poem, *Redwoods*, in *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, 2010.

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