

Gratitude

Weekly Leader Columns

Creating a Culture of Gratitude

More and more it is becoming evident that organizational leaders are not just decision-makers and systems managers, but the creators of a culture for the achievement of impact.

Borrowing from the open source software movement, let's describe this kind of culture as an open one.

What is an open culture, and what distinguishes it from past approaches to leading organizations?

Think of a culture being the product of the ideas and relationships of people. A culture, as a result, has distinguishing characteristics, patterns of activity and branded ideas, systems and material objects that represent that culture. A culture is also those connecting ideas of purpose, values and vision that are acted out by the people within the culture. In this sense, the culture is what binds people together to a group, a movement or an organization, and provides them a way to interact and support what matters to them collectively.

Therefore, cultures can be open or closed, healthy or dysfunctional, unified or confused, sustainable or dying.

I am suggesting that the key to creating a healthy, sustainable culture for your business, organization or community is openness.

For example, with an open culture there are *low barriers to contributing*. A new person can join, and immediately make an impact. There is no process of jumping through hoops to determine whether you are worthy of contributing. I see this particularly in social organizations, whether it is a club or religious congregation. In a more open culture, people join and start participating and contributing right away. The contribution is valued, and not just something perfunctory, like being a member of the least important committee.

Another characteristic of an open organizational culture is *a high incidence of personal initiative* being taken by members. In my mind, initiative is the beginning of all leadership. Without initiative, there is no leadership, only passive followership.

In a closed culture, the initiative is reserved for the authority figures. They decide what the group does and doesn't do. This high control environment means that personal initiative is resisted and those who may be more independent, creative and innovative in their attitudes and behaviors are discouraged or punished for being so.

In an open culture, people recognize that they have the opportunity and responsibility to create new and better ways of realizing the impact of their organization. So, they take personal initiative to make difference that matters.

The Connection from Openness to Gratitude

As the importance of creating an open environment in a business became more clear to me, I came to realize that the Five Actions of Gratitude that emerged from my Say Thanks Every Day project of last year was not just a collection of good ideas, but a core strategy for creating openness in a business.

Say Thanks Every Day was an idea that I submitted as an answer to a national contest by Daniel Pink to promote his book, The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: The Last Career Guide You Will Ever Need. This simple idea had such resonance with people that I had to pay attention to what they were saying to me. So, instead of being closed minded, and discounting what people were saying, and moving on to the next project, I tried to discern what I was hearing. From that interaction with people, I saw five actions that people and organizations can do to practice gratitude everyday. And what I now appreciate even more is that there is more there than I even recognized at the time. In other words, if you as the leader of your business were to practice these five actions of gratitude, then it would transform every aspect of your business. Let me show you.

The Five Actions of Gratitude as Open Organization Strategy

Each of the actions is an outreach of openness to others. It is not protective, defensive, exclusionary or elitist. It is open, grateful, giving, welcoming, respectful and creative.

To *Say Thanks* is to recognize another person or group's contribution. Do this genuinely and regularly, and those contributions are encouraged even more.

To *Give Back* is to recognize that I want to return back to a person, group or a community some measure of the goodness that I've received from them. This is not a payback of a debt owed. Rather, it is an act of thankful contribution. Imagine if this was the culture of your office right now. What would it look like. Maybe, what you'd see is a higher level of not just contribution, but sharing of work and responsibilities so that it gets done, and done well.

To *Make Welcome* is to act as host to your guests. It is easy to see customers as guests. How about your employees, your vendors, or even your competitors? By creating an environment of openness by welcoming people into your business, you invite them to contribute through their personal initiative and the exercise of their talent. Imagine if everyone of your employees were contributing just 10% more than they were a year ago. What difference would that make to your business' ability to serve customers?

To *Honor Others* is to recognize that none of us are self-made people. We all have those who have made it possible for us to be here. Some we might know, like our parents, or a mentor, others we might not know. However, if we practice honoring people for their contributions, then we'll see that honor being shared with others. And the workplace will become a place of honor, and not a place of drudgery and low morale.

To *Create Goodness* is see that all that we do contributes or detracts from our families, businesses, communities and industry. When we open up the culture of our organizations, we invite people to be creative in innovate new ideas, approaches and products. It is not about what I can get in return, but rather how can we create an environment that is healthy and sustaining to all.

Creating an Open Culture of Gratitude

These practices are not just good ideas, which they are, not just good things to do, which they are, but more importantly systems for the effective functioning of every organization. In order for a system of gratitude to be developed, the system that currently exists must be changed or replaced. It may be a

small change or a large one, but turning your organization into an open culture of gratitude will create an environment of leadership that will attract the best people to join you.

Leading in an Open Culture of Gratitude

Now, here's the catch or the rub, as they say. Transforming your organization's culture from a closed one to an open one is dependent on you changing first. It is a simple change, but a very difficult one. It is difficult because it is not tactical, but personal. In order for an open culture of gratitude to grow, you have to decide in your own mind that you are not the go-to-guy for everything, that you can't make every decision, resolve every issue, be the king or queen on the throne, and be the one who dictates the course of your business. You can't even be the expert at creating an open culture of gratitude. You have to realize that you are a facilitator of talent, and that the value of that talent is only realized fully when each person is free to exercise their personal initiative for the greater good of the customer, the other employees, the business and the community. This is a change of mindset, of attitude and behavior. This is the supreme test of the character of the leader. Can you let go and let your people lead? If you can, then you can create an open culture of gratitude. If not, then you will be following those who can do it.

Openness is the key, and gratitude is the strategy that elevates openness to a practical, functional level. Be grateful, giving, welcoming, honoring and creative and you'll find new depth of impact emerging from the parts of your organization that never produced to their potential. It all starts by being open.

The Stewardship of Gratitude

Over the past months, I have watched and listened to how people talk about the economic challenges that they are facing. For many they face a hard road of rebuilding lost retirement assets. For others it is seeking to discover a new purpose and vocation for their lives. For some, it is the realization that the global economic recession never touched them in any detrimental way. And for many of us, we are caught in the middle, knowing that change is needed, yet not clear where to go and why?

What has impressed me during these months has been people who chose not to become cynical whiners and with fresh commitment and optimism pursued new ventures, redoubling, even tripling their efforts to make a difference in the social and organizational environments where they lived and worked.

Some of my closest associates are these people, and have had a banner year of impact. Knowing them, their reaction is not surprising. They see their survival and success as a gift, not a badge of accomplishment.

As I have reflected upon what I see, I've reached a number of conclusions about how we should conduct ourselves as leaders in life and work. I've learned from my own successes and failures. Learned from the surprises and the chance encounters that have made a huge and indelible impact upon my life. I'm coming to recognize more that what I encounter each day is a gift that comes with responsibility.

At the core of what I see are some principles that can be lumped into the broad categories of stewardship and gratitude. The latter one, a topic that I became known for, not because of my excellence in its practice, but rather, like a blind pig sniffing for truffles in a French forest, I stumbled across a logical idea in an online contest that entered me into a world of people that I did not know existed. The former, of stewardship, has been a subject that I have ventured in and out of over the years, particularly during the 1990's when I was working with a friend conducting capital campaigns for churches and non-profit organizations. What I am coming to learn is that stewardship and gratitude are

cut from the same piece of cloth, and provide a perspective on our global society and world of business that provides direction for leaders in their service.

A core understanding for both stewardship and gratitude is the idea that we are people who have been given a gift or many gifts. While the gift or gifts may now be in our possession, there comes with it a responsibility that we should not ignore. Viewing our life and work as a gift will determine how we manage the challenge times of transition that we are in.

In this series, I am suggesting that leaders of organizations and communities see their roles as stewards rather than managers. As stewards, leaders look beyond their own self-interest or even the interest of their company or community alone, to see how assets are gifts, not just resources, and as gifts, ones to be shared. The steward creates a giving culture, rather than a grasping or taking one. This is not a zero-sum perspective. Rather, it is a recognition that abundance exists wherever giving is the norm.

It is difficult to acquire the perspective and practice of stewardship without the perspective and practice of gratitude. Both require a mindset that acknowledges a connection and responsibility to people and institutions outside of our own personal domain.

To be a steward is to recognize an obligation to care for that which has been given.

To be grateful is to recognize the connection that we have to the kindness and trust of those who have given to us.

In essence, as leaders, we recognize that we are not self-made individuals, but rather the product of the connections and contributions that others have made throughout our lives. I know that for some people this means that the hardships and abuse that they have experienced be seen in a different light. For many have found in seeking to overcome life's challenges, the gift of self-reliance and a clear-eyed understanding of the importance of whole and healthy human relationships. As a result, to be a steward of one's business and act in a grateful way is a choice that we each can make, and one that we must grow into, and not simply adopt as an inspiring mantra

The Stewardship of Gratitude is a strategic platform for social and organizational change. I look forward to exploring with Weekly Leader readers this revolutionary perspective.

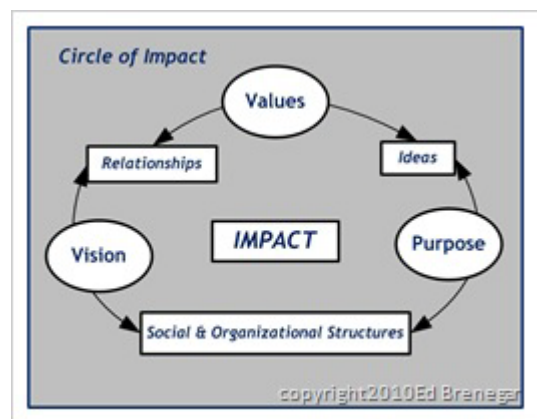
The Steward's Art

An artist is a person who takes common materials, joins them together to create something of beauty that can elevate people or a society's perception of their lives.

The artist sees connections between ideas and objects, people and situations, and brings them together in a meaningful way.

Within each of us is an artist waiting to emerge.

The material of our art doesn't have to be paint, brushes and canvas. It can be people, policies and purpose. In my Circle of Impact guide, the artist's materials are ideas, relationships, the social environment and organizational structure. The organizational artist brings them all together to create something that elevates participants'



perception of what is possible when they join together.

Leadership is much more like art than it is a science.

As the steward of the organization, the leader cares for it, strengthens it, protects it, and seeks to sustain its value through the inevitable transitions in time.

Most people I know would not label themselves as leaders, nor as an artist.

However, they would agree that they care about the people, the institutions and communities where they live and work. The question for us is,

How does our caring get expressed in ways that make a difference that matters?

When we care for something, we have chosen to become of a steward of its life. Stewardship is the practice of caring. It is more than showing up, participating in an activity, and going home. It is taking a personal stake in the progress and welfare of the group, organization or environment.

I'm sure many of you have served on boards of one kind or another. To be a board member is to be a steward of the organization's future. There are two approaches that generally can be taken. One is to preserve the current system, and resist any change that might threaten the organization's historic mission and approach. The other is to be first the steward of the mission, not the organization. In so doing, to creatively seek to find the best system or organizational structure for the future. This latter approach opens the organization to a far greater opportunity for the artist to creatively practice the art of leadership as stewardship.

I once worked for a client whose company had gone through a troublesome time with the unethical actions of former leaders. As stewards of the company, the new CEO and Board Chair chose to begin their service by focusing on the values of the company. By taking this approach, they elevated everyone's perception of the value of the company and gave employees and the community a platform from which to support the company's development in the future. As a result this company has been recognized as one of the most trustworthy companies by Forbes magazine.

When organizational stewards are creative in their service, they first of seek to understand the materials that are available for their use. Those resources are financial, material, and human, as well as governance policies and operating structure. There is the network of supporters, the local community environment, the conceptual ideas that inform the mission of the organization, and different types of approaches to how to be an organization. The steward as artist creatively connects and blends these various materials to create a vision that inspires, guides and unifies the constituents of the company to focus together on the future. The organizational artist looks beyond the conventional use of these materials to see how new ways can bring strength and sustainability to what they care about.

The major distinction between the steward as artist and many contemporary leaders is that they understand that the work of art is more important than the artist. The culture of the artist respects the materials and seeks to exploit their potential for creating an organizational work of art of strength and sustainability.

For the organizational leader to be both steward and artist requires a presence of mind that is open and mature. The leader learns to see that which others cannot. From this vision, the leadership steward enables others to share in the steward's art. As a result, the company becomes a work of beauty that elevates everyone's perception of the difference that they can make that matters. And a more sustainable environment for managing the challenges and transitions of our time is created.

A Steward's Vision

To be a Steward of an organization is not a default option for leaders. It is a choice; an intention that requires a specific perspective about the role and responsibilities of leading.

It is more than a perspective of managing. It is a vision for what the organization has been and what it can be in the future. For the steward, the company is not her own, even if she owns it. It is something larger, beyond the structure of policies, products, systems and resources. It is a vision of potential and sustainability.

Most leaders who have had any training are taught the mechanics of managing. They acquire the mindset and skills of leading by their own self-development, by trial and error in life and work, and through mentors who help them to learn. However, development as a steward is not for one's own sake. It is development for the sake of an idea or a purpose or a calling. It is development that elevates the steward's perspective to be a vision for the potential impact that the organization can have.

A steward's vision incorporates many things. Let's look at five.

1. An Understanding of the past. The past is not simply historical. Not just names and dates on a calendar and in an annual report. It is also a culture and an experience that people have. I recall working with a group, and what they wanted was to return to a time twenty years in the past when their company was like a family. To see that perspective and understand it is what philosophers call wisdom. To see the past as an expression of the values of the company during that time and in that place is to understand the potential that resides latent in the organization.

The steward sees the best of the past and understands it as an asset that gives strength and continuity to the organization. For the steward to do this, she must respect the past as a living part of the company as it exists today. The remnant of feeling and experience informs those who have been with the company a long time about whether their current leadership is worth following or merely tolerating. The steward sees this and understands, and she treats this knowledge with respect and dignity.

2. A Perception of the future potential. A vision for the future is a picture of realized potential. This picture is not a snapshot, but rather like a time-lapsed photographic record of the organization in action. It sees how the organization grows and develops over time. It is a vision of possibilities and opportunities, and of the limitations and potential problems that can inhibit the company's growth.

3. A Commitment to Sustainability. Do you have any idea what is required for your business to be sustainable in five years? Being able to understand, or better, see what sustainability looks like for your organization is an essential element in a steward's vision.

Sustainability is a commitment to responsible growth. It is not a vision of maintaining the status quo. It is a perspective that puts the mission of the organization above the structure of the organization. As a result, to protect, preserve and promote the mission of your organization is to be vigilant in developing an operating structure which makes sense for the mission's success.

4. An Appreciation of People. A steward understands that people are the core assets of a company. Therefore the care of employees is an important aspect of a steward's vision. This perspective goes beyond the relationship between leader and followers. It also sees that the structure of the organization must support people to the extent that they exhibit leadership behavior as stewards as well. If there is only one steward, then the organization will suffer. However, if the structure of the organizations allows for the self-development of people to become steward leaders, then many of the

issues and problems that bubble up to the top of the executive leadership chain will find their resolution by those who seek to give their best in their service to the company at all levels.

5. A Vision of Impact. We all know people and businesses who simply exist. They have a niche. They live in that niche, and survive the ups and downs of the economy. What they can't really show is the impact that they have had over time. A steward understands that an organization's value is in its impact. To be able to say, "*We make a difference that matters.*" is to say, we are more than just a structure existing in time and space. We are a contributor to the world of our clients, employees and community. Our impact matters because we believe our mission matters, and when we do well, it means that our mission and impact aligned for success.

A steward's vision is more than a strategic plan and a list of goals. It is more than inspiring ideas, that are unrealistic and impractical. It is a picture of the legacy of impact that the company wants to create through its people. The steward, as a result, becomes a champion of this vision, for if she is an able steward, it is not her vision alone, but one shared by the whole community of constituents that surround the business.

The starting point is the desire to be a steward of your company's future. You must have a vision of yourself as steward before you can lead others to have the same for themselves and the company.

The Steward's Authenticity

The motto of my home state North Carolina is *Esse Quam Videri* It means "*To Be, rather than To Seem.*" I find this a good place to start a discussion about what it means to be an authentic steward.

Can a person seem like a steward and not be one? Can a person seem to lead and not?

What is authenticity in the context of being a steward and leader of a business?

Is it? "*What you see is what you get?*" Not exactly.

Is it when a person's words and actions are align? Possibly. But not always. It has to do with something more than that

To be, rather than to seem implies that a person is the real thing. But what is the real thing?

For something or someone to be real, it means that it or they are a genuine representation of the idea or thing they represent.

What does it mean for someone to be an authentic steward of their business, organization or community?

It means that stewardship is more than a tactic, more than a slogan, more than a brand. It is something genuine and real in the person herself that people identify as representative of what it means to be a steward.

Being a steward is not something you just do by following some formula. It is something you do because of who you are. It is something that you become by doing, and allowing the doing to change into what you aspire to be. If life were not so, we'd never become anything more than what we were at our last moment we stopped growing, stopped becoming.

For example, there are many musicians who can play note for note J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations. But none played them with quite the same authenticity as Glenn Gould played it in his 1955 debut album. Listen and watch him play in this Google video. In the original recording, you can hear him humming along. Many other pianists have recorded this collection of solo piano pieces, but it was Gould who played it as it was living with him. There is authenticity in his playing as a result.

To be authentic means that we are the embodiment of the idea that we represent. When we stand before a group and speak on the topic of our passion, the more the message comes from deep within, the more authentic it becomes.

I am saying that leadership, stewardship and authenticity is more than tactical management process. It has a moral component to it. Not that of moral obligation, of simply knowing right from wrong. It goes deeper than that. It is moral in that it built upon a platform of values that unite the various parts of the organization together as a whole. This authenticity is a product of the stewards and leaders who embody these values in how the function within the company.

To be authentic, to be seen as a living embodiment of the ideals and values of your business is to have earned the respect and trust of people. To be recognized as authentic is an honor that becomes a platform for expanding the reach of the company's impact.

Today, there is no fooling people. Either you are authentic, a real steward, a trustworthy leader, or you are not.

If you are becoming that kind of steward or leader, then you are authentic. If you are not becoming, you can't fake the authenticity. To be authentic creates a platform that attracts people to join and contribute. This another way that a steward creates a culture of sustainability that enables their businesses or communities to manage the challenges and transitions that we are facing.

Authenticity isn't a title, it is a way people measure whether we are worthy of their trust. Today, there is no rarer or more important currency than trust, which is the product of authentic leadership.

How do you become an authentic steward or leader?

You have to want it. It must first be a desire that makes you willing to become a different person than you have been.

You must accept responsibility and being willing to be accountable. As you do so, you also accept your own limitations, and embrace the strengths and abilities of others. Stewards understand that they can't do it all themselves. To be authentic is to be real, and that means we do not present a false face to the world.

You have to make connections. This is especially with people who share a similar view point. Within your organizations are people who are invisible stewards who come to work everyday and work as authentic workers for the company. They don't attract attention to themselves. They come in, contribute their best, and leave quietly without fanfare. These people need to be found, so that the stewardship of the work they do is supported and appreciate.

It is not too simple to say that to be an authentic leader or steward begins with one's relationship to people. Where there is respect, trust, openness, honesty, caring and accountability, there is a platform for the development of the stewardship of authenticity throughout the organization. This is not a pipedream, but one of the reasons why so many businesses survive the trauma of economic decline. These authentic stewards of the company are the hope for the future.

Is there a difference between stewardship and leadership?

Is there a difference between being a steward and being a leader?

I'm tempted to say, "No, they are virtually the same." And I'd be wrong. However, to make a point here, I will over simplify what is in reality quite complex.

Let's look at leadership and stewardship as a type of herding function in an organization. We've all joked about how leading certain teams or organizations is like "herding cats." Remember this Super Bowl ad from several years ago?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pk7yqITMvp8>

Herding is creating an environment where a bunch of independent, willful animals are led in a common direction to fulfill a shared mission. The leadership function of herding is getting all the cats or sheep, or goats or American Bison (see picture above) to move in sync to fulfill a mission. The stewardship function of herding is caring for the herd so that all the members of it arrive at their destination whole and healthy.

In the 19th century, when cattle drives in the western United States brought large herds of beef cattle to railroad heads to be transported to markets in the Midwest and East, the responsibility of the herders was not only to get their cattle to their destination, but to arrive in good shape in order to command a top dollar price for the herd.

The Sons of the San Joaquin, a Western band, in their song Trail Drive, sing about the Trail Boss's advice to the herders.

"Push 'em on.

Keep 'em movin'.

Trail 'em slow,

or you'll walk 'em thin by the time you reach Montanio."

The Steward of the herd is responsible for getting it safely and intact to their destination. It is a role that is focused on the people and the relationships that they have with one another as a team. If every project or crisis ends up wearing people out, then sustainable progress towards the team's ultimate mission goal becomes more difficult.

The leader is mission driven. The steward is sustainability driven. Both are needed, and usually they are needed in the same person.

This is the challenge of leading. It is not simple. It is highly complex because there isn't one day and done, or one project at a time, but many days, and many projects that are competing for resources that are limited and often poorly allocated.

How, then, does a person in a leadership role function also as a steward?

The answer is counter-intuitive.

Lead by being a steward, and create with your team, a collaborative, shared leadership environment. Many heads working together, not against one another, means the group will function in a healthy manner, and remain whole and intact for the next project or trail drive.

Be a steward by focusing the team on the mission or goal to be reached. Herd them together around the mission, and instill in them a shared responsibility for its achievement.

If you are the leader of a large complex organization, the steward's function is to create an environment where the perception is that the organization's mission is our mission. Together, we fulfill our mission by collaborative work, not by work in isolation.

If you are the leader of a smaller organization, care for your people, and be absolutely clear about what your mission and the measurements of success are. Don't assume they know or understand what your perception of the mission of the company and their role in it is.

The Leader/Steward is a mission focused / people focused person embedded into the herd of an organization to get everyone to a successful destination. Both functions are required to create progress and sustainability in an organization. And both are needed in the person who is the leader.

The Stewardship Perspective

One of the hidden problems of traditional leadership is a narrowness of perspective that is translated into a type of tunnel vision. Too often the leader, wrapped up in his own focus to strategic details, believes that his vision is THE vision. The longer this perception persists, the more insular and resistant to new ideas and approaches the leader becomes.

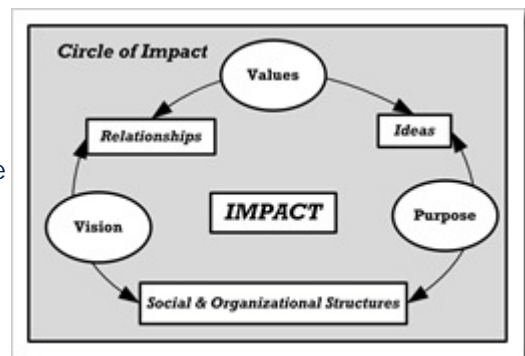
It is helpful to think of leadership as a circle encompassing the three dimensions of ideas, relationships and the social & organizational structures that provide the context for leading. Reduce or limit any of these dimensions and the ability of the organization to communicate, collaborate, and coordinate programs and operations is narrowed. This narrowing is different than focusing, which doesn't exclude, but prioritizes.

Following the circle image, what is relevant to leading is inside, and everything else is outside. In a traditional structure where there is one leader, and the rest are followers, it is impossible for the circle not to become more narrow over time. This is especially true today as the amount of information and the complexity of organizations are taking quantum leaps.

There are, as a result, two trends that are problematic for organizations. One is narrowness of perspective, and the other the lack of access that "lower" members of the organizational hierarchy have to leadership.

A solution is to develop a stewardship ethos in the organization. This is a shift away from narrowness and hierarchy to openness, cross-discipline collaboration, and shared responsibility. A way to approach this move is to see that each of the three dimensions of leadership - Ideas, Relationships and Structure - become the responsibility of everyone in the organization. These dimensions function as the context for Communication, Collaboration and Coordination.

Think about that for a moment. Consider how each of the people in your organization can take initiative to be responsible for communicating, collaborating and coordinating their work with others.



Is this happening now? If not, it may be due to an operating structure that functions as a hierarchy of narrow personal interests. This is a product of the kind of traditional leadership that assumes that there is one leader, and everyone follows by complying with the expectations from the top. This is an approach that is less and less effective as the world of organizations changes. It is not a sustainable position for most organizations.

To bring about change requires commitment and consistency in implementing a stewardship strategy. This strategy involves communicating a revised understanding of the organization's purpose. It means training and support people as leaders in their specific roles within the company. And it means changing structures to enable higher levels of interaction and coordination between people, departments, divisions and units.

The aim of such a change is to create an environment where members of this organizational community care about its future sustainability and health to the extent that they are willing to invest their own ideas, relationships and work to make it better. Instead of being cogs in a machine, they become stewards whose contributions make a difference that matters.

It's a Gift

This post is one of a continuing series on The Stewardship of Gratitude, and marks a shift from an emphasis on stewardship to gratitude.

A real problem in many organization is the disconnect of people within the business from the mission as an idea to believe in. Work is simply a place to fill the space of time that provides income for living.

Only in the most forward thinking organizations is this reality appreciably different.

The issue is a simple one. It is a matter of perception by people as to what the organization is. Is it simply a structure for the purpose of attaching processes which produce a specific outcome? Is it a tool for personal wealth creation? Is it a means of personal expression of the values and purposes of the owner's life? Each is valid, and operative in most places. But there is another way to look at an organization that can expand our perception of its value.

We can see it as a Gift.

A gift is something given, received, then cherished with gratitude and care.

For example, almost a decade ago, a mentor of mine died of cancer. A couple months after his death, his wife asked me to come to their house. She took me to his closet. She said, "He wanted you to have his clothes." We were the same size, and his clothes fit as if they were originally mine. In this collection of clothes, was a simple navy blue blazer. Whenever I put it on, as I well in a few minutes to go to a meeting, I put it on in honor of him and his influence upon my life. This gift is not just a jacket; it something more.

The same is true of our organizations. They are not just mechanical process, financial spreadsheets, and human resources. It is a place where people have invested their hopes and dreams, given of their talent and commitment, and spent a large part of their life.

A steward sees the organization as a gift that is passed down to her to care for its mission and protect it from simply becoming a mechanistic tool for the expenditure of time and energy.

The gift that is given is not an object. It is an idea embedded in an object. My friend's jacket is just like any other common blue blazer. But it isn't because it was his.

The same with the businesses we lead. It isn't just a business, or an organizational structure. It is an idea that matters. It must matter because it is the idea, whether you call it mission, purpose, values or vision, that gives the structure its value.

When the steward sees the organization she leads as a gift, then her behavior as its leader changes. The care of the idea and the people who make it possible for it to thrive in an organizational shape grows in importance. She begins to see that the organization is no longer about her, but about something greater than her. It is partly the idea, but more the connection that the idea has to other people.

Some may call this idea its brand, but that is to reduce it to a marketing gimmick. Today there are many successful stewards of the idea that is embedded within an organization.

I think of Steve Jobs whose Apple organization has brilliantly taken an idea and stewarded it to preeminence in the technology field. I think of Chris Anderson's TED conferences that has created a community around the idea of sharing ideas that matter. And of his wife, Jacqueline Novogratz's Acumen Fund that is stewarding the idea of new ways to help the social and economic development of the least prosperous parts of our planet.

Each of them is the steward of an idea, and their organization a gift that is shared with the world.

The steward's mindset is one of openness and caring. It is not closed and selfish. It embraces and engages people to share in the stewardship of the mission and work of their organization. As a gift, it is one that is worthy of gratitude. It is at this point that I make a shift in our series to begin to explore the idea of gratitude as a function of the stewardship and leadership of organizations.

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The Gift of Gratitude

For some people, gratitude is a feeling that produces happiness. For others, it is a common courtesy that is the fuel of etiquette and ethics. For many, it is an unknown territory waiting for discovery. It is, however, a gift that daily is making a difference in the lives of people world over.

My interest in this column is to begin to identify the place that gratitude has in the practice of leadership in organizations, and its relationship to the principles of stewardship that I identified in earlier columns.

The gift that people experience through the expression of gratitude is many faceted. The awareness that we have when we express gratitude is the reception of some gift or benefit from someone else.

As I've reflected on my own experience, what I've come to see as the gift that another person gives that results in my saying thanks is *kindness*. Aristotle, in his book on Rhetoric, writes:

Kindness -- under the influence of which a person is said to "be kind" -- may be defined as helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper themselves, but for that of the person helped. Kindness is great if shown to one who is in great need, or who needs what is important and hard to get, or who needs it at an important and difficult crisis; or if the helper is the only, the first, or the chief person to give the help.

This is the sort of kindness that most of us have experienced in our life at some point. It may be through a friend, or an aunt or uncle, through the influence of an adult mentor or even as recognition in our work. The kindness is often given without any expectation of return. It is a simple expression of appreciation and affection that touches us in a meaningful, authentic way.

Our response is to say thanks. This is the picture I saw two years ago reading [Daniel Pink's](#) fine little book [The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: The Last Career Guide You'll Ever Need](#). The story is of a young man who was lost in a corporate environment, found his purpose and direction through the help of a variety of people through whom he learned some of life's important lessons. As a participant in an online contest that Dan created, I logically concluded that what Johnny needed to do was to say thanks to those people everyday, out of which was born the lesson, *Say Thanks Every Day*. From that day until now, I've been on a journey of growing awareness about the importance and impact of gratitude in life and work. I believe I can say that I am growing into becoming a more grateful person, rather than an expert on gratitude. There is a difference.

To *Say Thanks Every Day* is to be aware of the gifts that have to come to us in our life and work. To be grateful is to say thanks, and return kindness as a gift of gratitude.

An effect of the practice of gratitude is openness. There is a deep sliver of humanity who sees openness as an essential element in how we function in life and work. The [Open Source movement](#) began as a technology focused agenda, but has expanded beyond in all kinds of fields, as openness and transparency become standards for assessing the performance of organizations.

The practice of gratitude can be a gift of openness to an organization. It isn't just about opening the books, creating collaborative workteams or sharing openly in the development of next generation software. There is another aspect of openness that remains to be explored.

One of the Five Actions of Gratitude that I have identified is the practice of Making Welcome. This openness to people goes beyond simple hospitality. It requires the creation of an environment of openness that results in individual members of the organization having the freedom to take initiative to create goodness for the company.

This sort of openness lowers the barriers to leadership in the organization. Leadership understood in a particular way. Not positional leadership, but rather the impact of personal leadership within the range of responsibilities and talents that each person has. This openness is focused on the conditions required for a person to feel that there is permission for them to give their very best, to be creative, and to make a difference in ways that may not have been in the original plan. In other words, this type of openness provides for an organizational environment where each person's talent has a greater potential to be fulfilled in action.

It is not enough for openness to be a good idea, or even something that is communally shared with people in an organization. Openness needs to be structured by policy and practice, by training and adaptation, in order for it to become truly beneficial.

Gratitude becomes a gift of kindness when organizational leaders recognize that to open up their organizational systems to the initiative and talent of their people is to create a more harmonious, productive workforce. When a person feels appreciated because of the recognition she has received, then there is the likelihood that she will begin looking for ways to improve the functioning of her area. Create this environment for 10%, 20% or even 50% of your managers and staff, and the conditions for the company's success have changed for the better.

There is a great discussion taking place about how to change organizational structures to become more humane and collaborative. By the giving gratitude's gift of kindness and openness to your company,

you'll be taking great steps towards achieving a better, more sustainable structure for your business in the future.

Creating a Culture of Gratitude

A culture exists where people share common values, traditions and expectations for their relationships.

How does this work in a business?

In the most general terms, a business is organization around four areas of activity.

1. Governance by a board or management team.
2. Program, products or services provided to clients, customers and constituents.
3. Operations and administration that support the programmatic side of the business.
4. Resources, which are in general terms, financial, material, intellectual and human.

In a business, each of these areas will have a "way" it is done that makes it distinctive. It is a culture of values, traditions and expectations. Think of it as a "lens" through which people see or interpret what these functions of a business mean, and how they are to be conducted.

It is this culture of values, traditions and expectations that distinguishes one organization from another. It is why some people "fit" in the company and others don't. It is why change is so hard to accomplish. Most organizational resistance to change is cultural. That is one reason why logical, analytical reasons for change are often not successful.

To understand an organization you have to see both the functioning components of governance, program, operations and resources, and the cultural components of values, traditions and expectations. Both sets of perspective are important, especially, if new leadership arrives and knows that change is needed for the organization to move forward.

Of the three aspects of a culture, the values part is the most important. Traditions and the expectations of people are formed by these values. Values are THE core intellectual property of a business. They are more important than purpose, more important than policies, more important than the measures of success. They are the ideas that inform how we understand what our purpose, approach and accomplishments mean.

It is also true that they are probably the most hidden aspect of a business. Our values are so close to us that we don't see them until their validity is threatened by change or other values.

A Culture of Gratitude

This leads me to a question suggested by today's column's title: *How do we create a Culture of Gratitude*. Last week I wrote about how gratitude is a gift. The underlying message (value?) is that gratitude is not just a feeling but an action that we take; not just a response in thanks, but a way of looking at an organization. It is a culture that has its own values, traditions and expectations by people, and a culture that has its own actions that are uniquely its own.

The Values of Gratitude are simple. We see our life and work, even our organizations, our clients and staff as gifts of goodness and unrealized potential. As a result, our actions in relation to each of these

aspects of a business, accordingly are to treat them with the respect due a gift. These values are contrary to the isolated independence that is found in many organizations. To see a business as a gift leads to the realization of what I've been writing about for the past couple of months, that we are stewards of the gifts that we receive in our organizations. In a culture of gratitude, there is little place for the embittered sense of entitlement that can be found in many organizations.

The Traditions of Gratitude grow out of relationships where gratitude is expressed. These traditions build unity and a sense of purpose among the members of the organization's constituency. Traditions of gratitude honor people for their contributions, and serves to elevate a shared responsibility for the whole organization.

The Expectations for Gratitude is for more than being thanked for good work. It is an expectation that relationships within the company will be marked by respect, trust, and appreciation.

Aligning Structure with Culture

The problem in creating a culture of gratitude is thinking that it is about the ideas or values that people share in their relationships. There is more to it as I've come to see.

We need to align our culture with our structure, in order to see how a culture of gratitude informs and impacts the four aspects of an organization identified above.

Last week, I wrote about the values of kindness and openness as an integral part of the practice of gratitude.

How do we align *Kindness* and *Openness*?

Where does Kindness and Openness fit in the practices and policies of Governance?

How are the products, programs and services of our organization infused with kindness and openness?

Are the operations and administration of our company examples of the practice of kindness and openness?

How is the development and use of our resources guided by kindness and openness?

I know that these are not easy questions to answer. But that is why it is important to find a way to align the functional side of a business with its culture.

A culture of gratitude is a relationship based culture. It is not an ad-hoc nod of the head to relationships, but rather a way to organized a company with relationships at the center of its culture and business. This is the future. Not that gratitude is the future, but the quality of relationships as the driving force of a business that results from a culture of gratitude is the future. Gratitude is a perspective for understanding just how the relational side of a business can function at its best. For it to do so requires that we learn how to align the functions of our businesses with relationships that are marked by kindness, openness, and gratitude. This is why culture is an important key to the future of organizations.

The Subversiveness of Gratitude

Maybe I shouldn't let the cat out of the bag, or Pandora out of her box, but the practice gratitude is subversive. Just as The Cluetrain Manifesto theses #7 asserts - [Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy](#) - so does gratitude.

Gratitude is subversive because it changes relationships, especially those in organizations where hierarchy rules.

In many of the organizational settings in which we work, we are serfs to the the lord of organizational process. Procedures rule, and human initiative, ingenuity and creativity are subverted to the cause of order and standardization. This is order for an earlier time when business and production processes were predictable and regimented. Today's order is random, chaotic requiring people and organizations to function with a high level of agility and quickness. Instead of the order of parts in their fixed place, today's order is dynamic, shifting and found not in the parts but in their connections to one another. We see this in particular in those cross-discipline work teams that surmount the traditional boundaries of hierarchy.

What we are discovering, and the practice of gratitude is showing, is that truth is not in the discrete, isolated parts, but in their connection to one another. On a human scale, this means that our identity is not our position, title or place in a system, but rather the function that we have in connection. Collaboration and shared responsibility is the ground for understanding who I am within any social and organizational setting. The connection between the parts is where the action is, and the organization lives.

The Problem of Disconnection

A decade ago, I worked on a project with a hosiery mill to revamp how they organized their production process. The process involved seventeen steps in the making of a pair of men's dress socks. Steps from weaving the thread, to dyeing, sewing the toes, attaching the adhesive paper tab to hold the socks together, to the packaging for shipping. What we discovered was that each step in the process was isolated from the one before and the one after. Ask the men and women who worked the line about the process, they couldn't say much beyond a general description what happened at any one place along the line. They had one job, one job only, to do that job every day.

As a result, each station was organized to produce eight hours of product each day. It was a system of disconnection that produced more inventory than orders, as the plant's purpose became the process, not the product.

The production chief eventually realized what has happening and initiated the discussion that led to the project that I was on which unified the production system. Before the change, it took six weeks to make a pair of socks. After implementation, only six days. The major difference was connecting the whole system to focus on order fulfillment, instead of maximizing the productivity of each step of the process. By connecting every step to a common purpose, efficiency and capacity grew. Unfortunately, the company was unable to make the same shift to the marketing and sales of their products, and within a couple years of making the change, the plant was closed. Too little change, too late.

Here is where the practice of gratitude could have made a difference. Unifying the technical connections of a manufacturing process was relatively simple compared to developing a sales and marketing system based upon connection. If the connection was strong and healthy, the manufacturer could have realized that their business was not making socks, but rather providing a wide-range of services to those retail stores that sell socks. In the end, the weakness of the company's capacity for engagement with its customers led to their demise. However, with a strong connectional system in place, the company could have done a much better job communicating, collaborating and coordinating the shared responsibility of providing socks customers the best selection and service available.

The Subversive Nature of Say Thanks Every Day

Gratitude is subversive because it affirms and validates the importance of our connections to one another. The Five Actions of Gratitude are a practical way to elevate the connective nature of organizations to a place of impact. The impact of each of these actions strengthens the connective nature of organizations.

The impact of Saying Thanks is the recognition of the giftedness of life that comes through the agency of other people, organizations and communities.

The impact of Giving Back is the reinforcement that the true nature of connection is giving.

The impact of Making Welcome is the kind of openness that transcends the barriers of organizational hierarchy so that people are free to contribute.

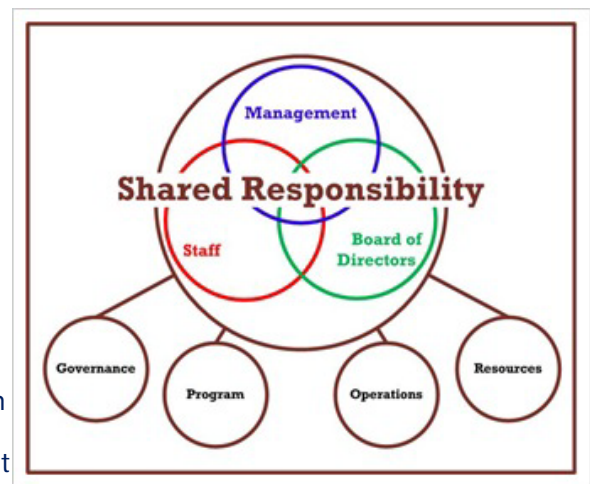
The impact of Honoring Others is the recognition and affirmation that giving makes a difference that matters.

The impact of Creating Goodness is the strength and satisfaction that comes from making a difference that matters.

The connection that people have within an organization is strengthened when these actions are practiced. The practice becomes a feedback loop of giving and response that is transformational because it changes the avenues for communication within the organizational structure. It is important though to see that this is not just about our relationship connection in organization. That is a part of an organizational connection system that involves all aspects of the organization.

The Practice of Gratitude leads to Shared Responsibility

In a connective system, each party shares responsibility for the whole system. The Connecting Ideas of the Circle of Impact - Purpose or Mission, Values, Vision and Impact - are the connecting links that not only provide a social basis for shared responsibility, but also an organizational. For the mission of the organization - its purpose or identity - provides the rationale for the kind of structure that is needed. Its values provide the rationale for our human connection to one another. And a vision for impact provides a rationale for the action towards impact that people jointly take through the social and organization settings.



In a connective system, all parties are responsible, and all are accountable to one another as a whole organization. Their individual responsibilities may differ according to position, talent, expertise, and task. This diagram is of one type of system of shared responsibility where management, board and staff share together the functions of governance, program, operations and resources. This type of system is based on a connection system of relationships where there is a high level of communication, collaboration and coordination practiced.

Gratitude as Strategic Connection

I hope this begins to show how the practice of gratitude is not just a way to create an ethical environment within an organization. My intent is to provide a picture of how a strategy of strengthening the relational connection of people in an organization is a way to develop a more agile, effective organizational structure. For the relational connection to grow, requires that connection to be marked by the recognition and support of a culture of giving and a response in gratitude. A system of shared responsibility provides a way for organizational leaders to align the parts of their organizations into a connected, collaborative, coordinated whole. I believe this is a beginning picture of the future of organizations at the structural level.

Next week: I will begin to look more closely at the individual practice of each of the Five Actions of Gratitude, beginning with Say Thanks Every Day.

Say Thanks Every Day

Over the past several weeks, I've been writing about the strategic importance of Gratitude to the leadership of organizations. The practice of gratitude can be described in terms of Five Actions:

Say Thanks

Give Back

Make Welcome

Honor Others

Create Goodness

For the next several weeks, I am going to take each one of the Actions and describe how to practice it, and the value and impact that can come from a consistent discipline of being grateful.

Let's begin with Saying Thanks Every Day.

Saying Thanks Every Day

To Say Thanks Every Day requires a change of perspective for most of us. I came to realize that my giving of thanks was perfunctory at best, and often insulting. I'd say *"Thanks for the red tie. I have one similar to it."* Somehow I missed the intention of the gift, and only saw it as another possession that I'd have to take care of. Graciousness was not evident in my response. I had that sort of mindset that thought I deserve better gifts than I received. I was ungrateful, and it hurt those who were giving to me out of love and kindness.

To be grateful is to recognize the impact that other people has upon our lives. It may be their love for us, or their affirmation of some talent that we have, or the access that their friendship gives us to someone who helps find success in life. Regardless, it is a person who is giving to us in some way that we should be thanking. The more aware we become, the more reason to say thanks.

I want to make one practical suggestion about Saying Thanks Every Day. If you try to depend on being inspired, you'll never fulfill the potential that resides in this activity. It is better to develop a discipline of gratitude. Here's an simple exercise that you can use on a weekly basis.

The Circle of Thanks

Take a moment to join me in a little exercise in giving thanks.

Take a piece of paper (Or use the [guide](#) that I've prepared). Draw a circle in the middle of it like the diagram here show. Let it cover about half of the space on the page. At the top of the circle, on the inside, write family, on the right, friends, on the left, influencers, and, at the bottom, write work. Around each of those words, write names or initials of people who matter to you, or those who are close to or whom you are associated with through work or some organization. For the influencers category, write down names of people whose work or life story has impacted you in some positive way.

In the middle of the inner circle write down those acts of kindness or impact that these people have done to make a difference that matters in your life and work.

All I'm looking for are a list of names of people and reasons to say thanks to them. It is just that simple.

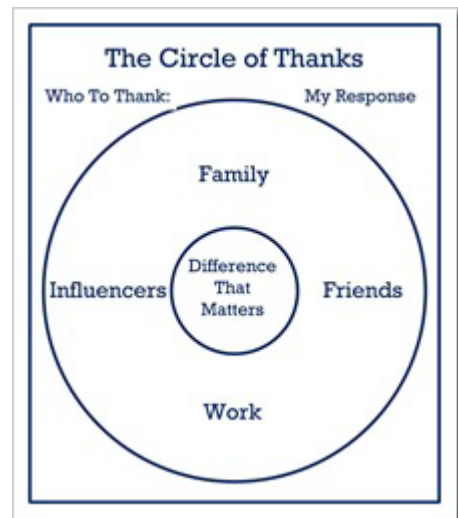
If look on the diagram, you'll also see tow headings: **Who To Thank** and **My Response**.

This exercise is designed for weekly use. The list of the people you need to thank at first maybe quite long, and then a manageable one for a week.

The second list identifies what your response should be. It could be a simple as writing a note of thanks. Or it could be more elaborate like preparing a surprise party for this person. The point is to become intentional about giving thanks, rather than simply spontaneous.

Try this for a few weeks, and let me know how it works.

The Impact of Saying Thanks



When we say thanks, there are two things that are accomplished.

The first is recognition for the act of kindness that the other person did. This recognition changes the relationship between the two people. It strengthens the bond of caring or in a business of collaboration.

The second effect is that it opens us up to see possibilities and opportunities that we could not see before. We couldn't because when we fail to appreciate the gifts of others, we fail to see beyond our own self-sufficiency.

As Thanksgiving Week in the US begins, take the Circle of Thanks, fill it in and take it with you to dinner and share with your family and friends just how important they have become to you.

Say thanks in a genuine and authentic ways, and your Thanksgiving Celebration will be a special part of each year.

The Give Back Two Step

For too many people, gratitude exists primarily as a feeling about people and situations. Yes, to feel grateful contributes a sense of happiness and enhanced health. Is that why gratitude is important? The salutary effects are a by-product, not the reason that we should feel grateful.

Feeling grateful, just like any feeling, can be misunderstood and misleading. There are all kinds of ways to manipulate our feelings as a way to avoid dealing with some other darker reality.

Feeling grateful is not enough for our lives to be filled with happiness and health. I am convinced that we must act in a grateful way, and not in some off-hand, random way, but with clear intention and purpose.

To act grateful, as I wrote a few weeks ago in a column, "affirms and validates the importance of our connections to one another." Just feeling that connection is inadequate. That other person may never know of our feelings of gratitude. We must act on those feelings by making the connection between us matter. This is the purpose of the Circle of Thanks guide that I create to identify whom I need to consciously, intentionally, actively thank.

A feeling of gratitude can be here one moment and then gone on the wisp of another feeling or distraction. An act of gratitude changes the relationship, and in an organizational context is a subversive act against those structures that inhibit the exchange of genuine human emotion and the interactions that create a stronger, healthier social bond within the organization..

The Giving Back Connection

In the scheme of The Five Actions of Gratitude, the second action is to **Give Back**, which is similar to the idea of Paying It Forward. The difference is that we make the connection with those whom have made a difference in in our life and work.

I came to understand this as an act of gratitude because of a local group, Lessons in Leadership, that I am a part of here in Asheville, N.C. We are an all volunteer, charitable, leadership motivation and training event group that came into being as a way *"to give back"* to our community. We host a Main Event every January. Our next event is January 26 at Lipinsky Auditorium at UNC-Asheville. You are welcome to attend. We also conduct leadership workshops, using local talent. Our events are offered at a low cost so that businesses and organizations in our community, who would not ordinarily have the

resources to pay to attend a world class leadership event, can bring their teams. All the money we raise goes to local charities.

Our joint experience of giving back over the years has strengthen our friendship and shown each of us in very tangible ways the importance of saying thanks and giving back can be for our lives and work. Our friendship transcends most of our business relationships because gratitude is at the heart of what we seek to do.

Two Steps to Giving Back

There are two steps to giving back.

The first is to express your gratitude to the person or group to whom you have feelings of gratefulness. Using the [Circle of Thanks guide](#) is a way to identify who these people may be.

The second step is to find some way to honor the gift for which you are grateful by giving back in service.

For many non-profit organizations, their most passionate, loyal volunteers were at one time recipients of their services. Now, they join the organization as a way of giving back in thanks by helping others.

I know people who are dedicated to donating blood because of the units of blood a loved one received during a serious illness. Many people serve on non-profit boards because of the service the organization has provided them in the past.

Many philanthropic gifts are built around the connection that we have with one another. "I'll support your cause if you support mine." Behind this expression of friendship are feelings of respect, mutual contribution and gratitude. I'm sure that there is a short list of people for whom you'd drop whatever you are doing to respond to a request or need that they may have.

This exchange of gratitude expressed in service is a tangible demonstration of the importance that kindness and caring have in our relationships. These are expressions of human relationship that make it possible for great endeavors to succeed. Without there being a connection that is based in giving and service, the relationship lacks depth and the kind of impact that is possible.

When our expression of thanks is combined with service, the Give Back Two Step, we begin to see new avenues for our relationships to make a difference.

The Give Back Two Step Guide

Just like last week's Say Thanks planning guide, I've created one for Giving Back. The Guide illustrates the two steps that we can take, to say thanks and to give back.

As you reflected last week upon whom to thank, you developed a list. So, the first step is done. On this guide, I'm asking the following question to focus our efforts at expressing gratitude.

Who, in my Life & Work, has made a Difference that Matters?

The second question helps us to focus on how we can respond in service.

What Opportunities Do I Have to Give Back In Grateful Service?

The value of this action step may not seem evident at the beginning. However, if over the course of a few months or a year, you find that you respond to people by giving yourself in service to others, I believe you'll find that your experience of being grateful is far more whole and complete than it would be if all it meant was feeling grateful about various aspects of your life. The principle at work here is that in all healthy relationships there is a practice of mutuality that is the source of the meaning in our friendships and best work relationships.

So, give it a try. Go do something as an intentional act of gratitude for someone. It will make a difference that matters for those you thank and serve, as well as for yourself.

Next week, we'll look at the practice of hospitality as an action of gratitude. Thanks very much.

Make Welcome

The practice of gratitude transforms relationships. It opens us up to the gifts and talents that other people have. Leaders who place gratitude high on their list of values find that they must create an organizational environment that is open and welcoming.

A starting place to understand the importance of open hospitality is to ask your employees about the barriers to leadership and the performance of their best work. Many of them, I suspect, will refuse to see themselves as leaders because of past experience or the perception that leadership is a positional role, not a behavioral one. When an organization opens itself up to being a community of leaders, an expectation emerges that people will take initiative to make a difference that matters, and not merely do what they are told, or go along to get along, or only do enough to avoid getting fired.

All leadership begins in the personal initiative of the individual. For organizations to be leadership-filled, we must find ways to remove the barriers to personal initiative. We need to open up and make the workplace a more hospitable place.

Hostmanship

The importance of hospitality came to home to me several years ago from reading Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm's Hostmanship: The art of making people feel welcome and their follow up book, The Welcoming Leader: The Art of Creating Hostmanship. I was so moved by their leadership perspective that I wrote an extended review of Hostmanship, and later turned into an ebook - Hostmanship: A Leadership Ethic of Personal Responsibility (free download).

Here's how they describe Hostmanship. From their website:

A Welcoming World

"Imagine a world where people feel welcome and expected. A world where children, friends, strangers, guests, customers and colleagues dare to and want to meet each other for real. It is our belief that this is the basis for true and lasting success for us as human beings, our organizations and society we have been entrusted".

HOSTMANSHIP

A practical philosophy on the art of welcoming, comprised on six foundations; serving, responsibility, wholeness, caring, knowledge and dialogue.

THE THIRD FACE OF LEADERSHIP

In addition to Manager and Leader we encourage the face of the Host. Hostmanship looks upon all

organizations as Hosts, hosting community, dreams, a vision, a mission, talent, customers, partners and owners. Also the organization as a host in society, contributing to the well being of the whole.

Making People Feel Welcome

To act as a host is to act with gratitude because what we see in that other person is some value or attribute worth recognizing as worthy of attention. This is a giving posture in relationships. We give by opening up our organizations for people to enter into them to contribute and make a difference that matters.

To make people welcome is to invite them into the community that exists within the business. We invite them to participate in a wide range of activities and opportunities. For example, we can invite people to:

- Connect with Us
- Share New Ideas
- Initiate Projects
- Take the Lead
- Share Their Vision
- Welcome Others
- Contribute Their Best Work
- Make a Difference That Matters
- Say Thanks Every Day
- Give Back in Service

The challenge of creating a welcoming environment ...

... isn't the environment.

The challenge is within ourselves. The challenge is to model the attitudes and behaviors that we would like to see as emblematic of our organization. It starts with leadership, the leadership of personal initiative that shifts from a mindset of control to one of freedom, openness and high expectations for contribution. For many organizations, there isn't a high expectation for contributing, but rather the burden of meeting the high demands of compliance. In those instances, there is no room for initiative, and is not a place of welcome.

To truly practice open hospitality is to be a grateful person. Grateful for each person who walks through the door. Grateful for the gifts, talents, experience, expertise, character, commitment and good will that they bring.

Creating an open and hospitable environment is a start to creating an environment where the potential that each person brings to the organization can be fulfilled.

Here's a [handy guide](#) to give you a reference point for how to develop an open hospitable environment in your business. Just envision what it would be like if each of your people were taking initiative in each of these areas.

Honor Others

Human relationships have always mattered. The problem is that they've just not always fit well into the social and organizational structures that have existed. However, as the world becomes smaller through the agency of technology, our relationships within those social and organizational structures rise in importance. They begin to eclipse the artificial boundaries that those structures have historically used to guide human behavior and interaction. One of the ways we can see this trend is through the practice of gratitude.

The fourth action of gratitude is to Honor Others. It may appear on the surface that I'm thinking primarily of recognition of the sort that is given at an awards luncheon. That is one way of honoring others. However, in actuality, I'm thinking of something much different, much more fundamental to our relationships.

When I first identified the Five Actions of Gratitude, my sense of what honor meant had to do with recognition for life or work of distinction. Like the Congressional Media of Honor or the Irving G. Thalberg Award on a more personal, local level. However, the more I've thought about this, the more I came to see that honor is a fundamental attribute of all healthy relationships.

At the heart of honor is respect and good will. This of course is not always easy because there are many people for whom respect is not deserved and good will a wasted expression. Yet, if we look at most of the social and organizational settings that we are in, and see respect and good will as a basis for how people relate to one another in those contexts, we can see how it is a short step to practicing a type of honor that has a transformative effect upon a team.

Honor in a Team Context

Recently, as I watched a documentary on Russian film maker, Andrei Tarkovsky' filming of The Sacrifice, he spoke about his approach to working as a team on the set.

It is very important, and at the same time, very hard, to make set design, and camera man, and all the others working on the film into partners, collaborators in your plan. It is essential that they should not be in any way mere functionaries. They have to participate as creative artists in their own right, and be allowed to share in all your feelings and thoughts.

Imagine the team that you work on being like this. Your work, your participation, your creative artistry, your ideas, feelings, purpose and commitment all mattering to the performance of the team. This requires the leader to honor each person as a vital contributor.

Honor in this sense transcends what it means to recognize a person for a significant achievement. It is a change in the relationship between the leader and those who are led. Here's another piece from Tarkovsky that describes this perspective.

It is possible to move mountains when people, working together to realize the conception of the film. All with their different characters, temperaments, ages, and life histories are united as one family, and fired by a single passion. If a genuinely creative atmosphere can be built up in the team, then it ceases to matter who's responsible for any one idea, who thought of that way of doing a close up, or panorama, who first devised a lighting contrast, or camera angle.

When honor takes root in an organization, a unity and common sharing begin to take place. One of the earliest descriptions of this type of team was by the Apostle Paul two millennia ago. Using the metaphor of a body, he speaks about a congregation of believers in a way that is similar to Tarkovsky.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Corinthians 12:19-26 - emphasis mine.)

Now, while Paul may be speaking about a spiritual community, the idea that the relationships in any social or organizational environment could function in this way is not beyond the realm of possibility. We can all pinpoint situations where a person whom many people thought had the least ability or talent to offer makes a difference that matters in the course of a project. It happens all the time. What both Tarkovsky and Paul are suggesting to us is that honor is a function of a team where unity and high performance go hand in hand.

The Practice of Honor

To understand the practice of honor in this way means that we may have to change the way we look at people. In particular, those who are the most belligerent, annoying, negative, cynical and deceitful. It isn't that we deny that they behave in a destructive manner. Rather it is that we believe that within them there is a better side. We don't reach that better side by being just nice and complementary. Instead, we reach that other side by creating structures that create the kind of relationships that we see in Tarkovsky and Paul.

In the [Circle of Impact](#), we develop social and organizational structures in one sense to protect the relationships that constitute the group, team or organization. We do so to provide a foundation for unity and collaboration. Yes, I am suggesting that these structures have to be redesigned to support values like honor, respect and good will. We do this together, in conversation, defining what those structures look like.

Exercises in Honoring Others

If you have been following this series, you know that a few weeks ago, I posted a guide called [The Circle of Thanks](#). On that page, there are four categories of relationships that we may have: Family, Friends, Work relations, and those people who are Influencers in our life or work. Now take that list, and ask yourself how you can honor each person. What are the talents, the expertise, the values or expression of personality that you want to recognize and elevate as important. This is a way to begin to change the way we relate to someone.

It is helpful to understand that the person who is negative and quite difficult to work with is also telling you what they value and even, love. If they are always complaining about not being respected, they are telling you that they want to be respected. So, look for something that you can identify that is worth respecting in that person, and do it. Thank them for their attitude or behavior. What you may find is their demeanor changes because, finally, someone understands what they have been trying to communicate.

A Last Word

It is also important to recognize that the common use of honor in our society relates to people who have sacrificed on behalf of other people. This belief goes back to the days of Homer's Greece where the person of highest esteem was the one who sacrificed the most for their community. Do not forget

to recognize those who fall into this category. Many of them do not want to be celebrated as leaders. They do want to be thanked for their contributions to the people and the organizations that matter to them.

As you do recognize them, it may be helpful to craft your honor statement by recognizing three aspects of a person's motivation. One is that their actions are meant to be Personally Meaningful as they are based upon values that matter to them; Socially Fulfilling because the people in their social or organizational environment matter to them; and, Make a Difference that Matters as a contributor. Thank them for this in a genuine and authentic manner, and you'll begin to create a foundation of honor that can spread throughout your organization or community.

Create Goodness

The Five Actions of Gratitude is a system, not simply a list of activities. The fifth action, Create Goodness, is the linchpin of the five. The first four - Say Thanks, Give Back, Make Welcome, and Honor Others - can each stand on their own as a reasonable strategy for acting to better organizations and communities. It is hard to deny the importance of gratitude, service, hospitality and recognition for contribution? Yet, each functions best when the social and organizational environment is receptive to them.

Creating Goodness: A Marker of Change

The old Industrial model of business presumed that each person was a cog in a grand machine of industry and commerce. As I described in an earlier column, this created a disconnect between people and their work together. Relationships were messy and people's innovative ideas slowed down the system. It was a system built upon experts at the top of the structure directing the functionaries below.

The greatest detriment of the old model, though, was the loss of each person's potential contribution. The system was built for efficiency of activity, not optimization of potential. As a system of leadership and organization, it was not sustainable and, today, is contributing to the decline of modern industrial capitalism.

The Subversiveness of Gratitude revisited

The Five Actions of Gratitude are a set of modest ideas that are subversive of this old model. This is most apparent in the action of Creating Goodness.

To Create Goodness is based upon a simple understanding of human nature.

First, our humanness is discovered in action, through personal initiative. Innovation and discovery are the fruits of human initiative in seeking to understand the world, and find better ways to live and work in it. Individual initiative is at the heart of the entrepreneurial impulse. Initiative begins a process of discovery, creativity and leadership. It is a core function of our humanity.

In creating goodness, we lead in the many and varied contexts of our lives. We initiate with ideas as we communicate. Initiative happens in relationships as create collaborative partnerships. And it happens in the mundane activities of work, as we make decisions and act upon ideas.

Second, there is unique purpose to every person's life, expressed in action, in the work that we do. This is part of the reason why the old Industrial model was unsustainable. It denied the inherent

purposefulness of each human life. The result is a loss of much of the potential that resides in every organization and business.

The ancient Greek Philosopher Aristotle taught his students that *“every action and pursuit is considered to aim at some good....what is the highest of all practical goods? ... It is happiness, say both ordinary and cultured people; and they identify happiness with living well or doing well.”* By this he means that the actions born from our individual initiative, through our relationships, in our work and the daily course of our lives aim at goodness, defined as happiness or living or doing well in life and work. This is part of what was missing, and what The Five Actions of Gratitude seeks to restore.

Third, we live and work within communities of relationships that provide us a context for understanding who we are, what our talents are, and how our initiative can make a difference. Each of us is born with a creative impulse to contribute, to share, and, yes, to co-create with friends and colleagues. Our creative activity is always done in a social context of relationships. I've written elsewhere - [here](#) and [here](#) - about the importance of the local as a way to understand the nature of our interactions whether face-to-face or globally connected..

To Create

When we create, we interact with ideas, emotions, objects and social contexts. We bring these together to “create” a connection with ideas, in relationships and through the social and organizational setting where we live and work. Even the most cynical, nihilistic artist wants to create a connection between his art and its message. The art that comes from individual initiative, therefore, is personal, but not private in a hermetically sealed way.

When an organization structures its social life around creativity, it is saying to its employees that their contribution is not just measured, but valued. The purpose of developing organizations of [Open Hospitality](#) is to create an environment where people can release their creative potential in contributions of initiative and action that matter. In so doing, their initiative is not done in isolation from other initiators, but rather in collaboration with them. For the freedom to create in an organizational context should have as few barriers to initiative as possible, and as many opportunities to contribute as possible.

To Create *Goodness*

As we see in the Aristotle quote above, the purpose of our lives and work is to create *goodness*.

Contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in describing Aristotle's thought on this point wrote, *“What then does the good for... (humanity) ... turn out to be? ... It is the state of being well and doing well in being well”* The word that Aristotle uses is eudaimonia (eu-day-mo-knee-a), traditionally translated as goodness. Its meaning is much more complex than simply as an adjective for describing a piece of pie or last Sunday's football game. It touches on ideas related to fulfillment, human flourishing, happiness and completeness. The good person is one whose whole life is an integrated combination of thought, feeling, initiative, interaction, and action, resulting a good life or good work, or a better product, community or world.

Each person lives within specific social and organizational settings where their potential is realized in being persons who create goodness. Imagine with me again what this might mean if a whole organization was organized to create the conditions where each person within the company could live a good life? What we would see, I am convinced, are the other Four Actions of Gratitude lived out, not as special or occasional random acts of kindness or gratitude, but as the way we live and work together.

When a person creates goodness, they do so by taking initiative to make a difference that matters. As they do the practice of Say Thanks, Giving Back, Making Welcome and Honoring Others rises in importance. Our connections to one another become more important as this shift from a machine oriented model to a human centered one reaches maturity. This is what leadership is becoming in the 21st century. A Leadership Society of initiative creating organizations that come to be known as *"communities of leadership."*

The Tree of Gratitude

Several weeks ago, I began this series of columns discussing stewardship and gratitude. With this column, we come to the end of this series, but not to the importance of either. As each of us seeks to understand the thoughts and emotions that reside in our minds and hearts, we discover new areas of richness that we were unaware of, or at least had a glimpse of. This is certainly true of both the concepts of stewardship and gratitude.

Stewardship is the practice of responsibility for the arenas we touch with our lives and work. Gratitude, as I have come to see, has a much greater depth of meaning and strategic value that I realized before starting this series. I am grateful to Peter Mello and the Weekly Leader community for the opportunity to explore these ideas over the past few weeks.

The Five Actions of Gratitude are not simply actions. Just things we can do. They are a way we can strategically organize our life and work.

In many respects, the Five Actions - Say Thanks, Give Back, Make Welcome, Honor Others and Create Goodness - are responses to people and situations we encounter. These become more significant and impactful the more the ground for our response is conducive to our actions.



Let's use the image of a tree to explore this notion of a system.

The Tree of Gratitude

The Five Actions of Gratitude is an ecological system. Each action is related to the others, and they work best as a whole. Each action is nourished by the other. As a tree, it needs strong roots in healthy soil to provide the resources needed to grow. As you can see from this guide, the values that are the ground of gratitude are a set of values and behaviors that are expression of beauty and fruitfulness of the tree. These seven values, and there could be many more, create the environment for collaboration, and higher levels of communication and coordination in organizations.

How does one instill the values of creativity, kindness, goodness, service, open hospitality, respect and recognition in an organization. It begins with someone, presumably the senior leader, taking the initiative to put these values into practice. It isn't just doing them as an individual, but also seeing that these are strategic tools for development. In other words, someone has to care for the tree through the Five Actions of Gratitude. This can be done in many ways. Many companies have operationalize

creativity as an expectation of their employees. Many organizations have service days. Openness, respect and recognition are for many leaders important values that they bring to their relationships with staff.

Possibly, the most obscure of these values is kindness. We do not live in an age of kindness and gratitude. In my column [The Gift of Gratitude](#), I pointed to [Aristotle's](#) description of kindness

... as helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper themselves, but for that of the person helped. Kindness is great if shown to one who is in great need, or who needs what is important and hard to get, or who needs it at an important and difficult crisis; or if the helper is the only, the first, or the chief person to give the help.

The competitive intensity, operational complexity, and the rapid pace of change creates an environment where it is quite difficult to be kind and grateful. Yet, these are the values and practices that provide the ground for sustainability of our relationships, businesses and communities. This one of the reason I see the practice of gratitude as subversive to conventional leadership and organizational practice

The challenge is not just appreciating or even practicing these values. The challenge is creating the social and organizational structures which nurture the creativity, openness, and goodness that produces leadership in people. As a result, to create organizations of kindness and gratitude requires us to look at how businesses are designed and organized. In so doing, we find the source of positive change that prepares us for the opportunities that the future holds.

Where do I start?

There is no better place to start than to say thanks. Use my [Circle of Thanks](#) guide to help you be as broad and diverse as possible in identifying the people and situations in your life and work for which you can be grateful.

Once you've created your list, you need to do something tangible with it. Send a note or make a phone call. Make a donation. Reach out someone new in the office. Take someone who has influenced you to lunch. The acts themselves are less important than the doing of them. The more you put your feelings of gratitude into action, the more easily you'll see how to be more effective in your actions.

Don't approach this exercise from a negative or critical point of view. It really doesn't matter if you haven't been grateful enough throughout your life. What matters is becoming so for the future. By appreciating what you have you begin to have a change of perspective about what matters in your family and business life.

Final Thoughts

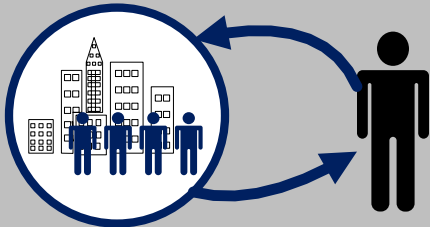
It is my hope that these columns have provoked you to Say Thanks Every Day. I hope that you seek to be more grateful by recognizing the gifts that you have in your life and work. If you have a story to tell or a question to ask, I'd love to hear from you.

Say Thanks Every Day

The Power of Gratitude in Life and Work

The Five Actions of Gratitude Create a Difference that Matters

Give Back



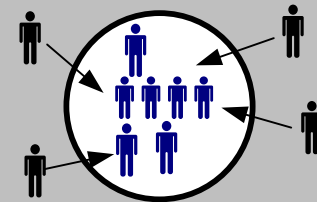
Serve people and communities who have made a difference to you.

Say Thanks



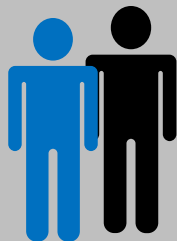
Say Thanks Every Day in appreciation for the contributions that people and communities make.

Make Welcome



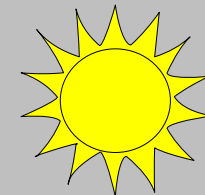
Practice a hospitality of openness and opportunity for people to make a difference.

Honor Others



Honor people and communities for their contributions and example.

Create Goodness



Foster an environment for the creation of goodness through personal initiative.

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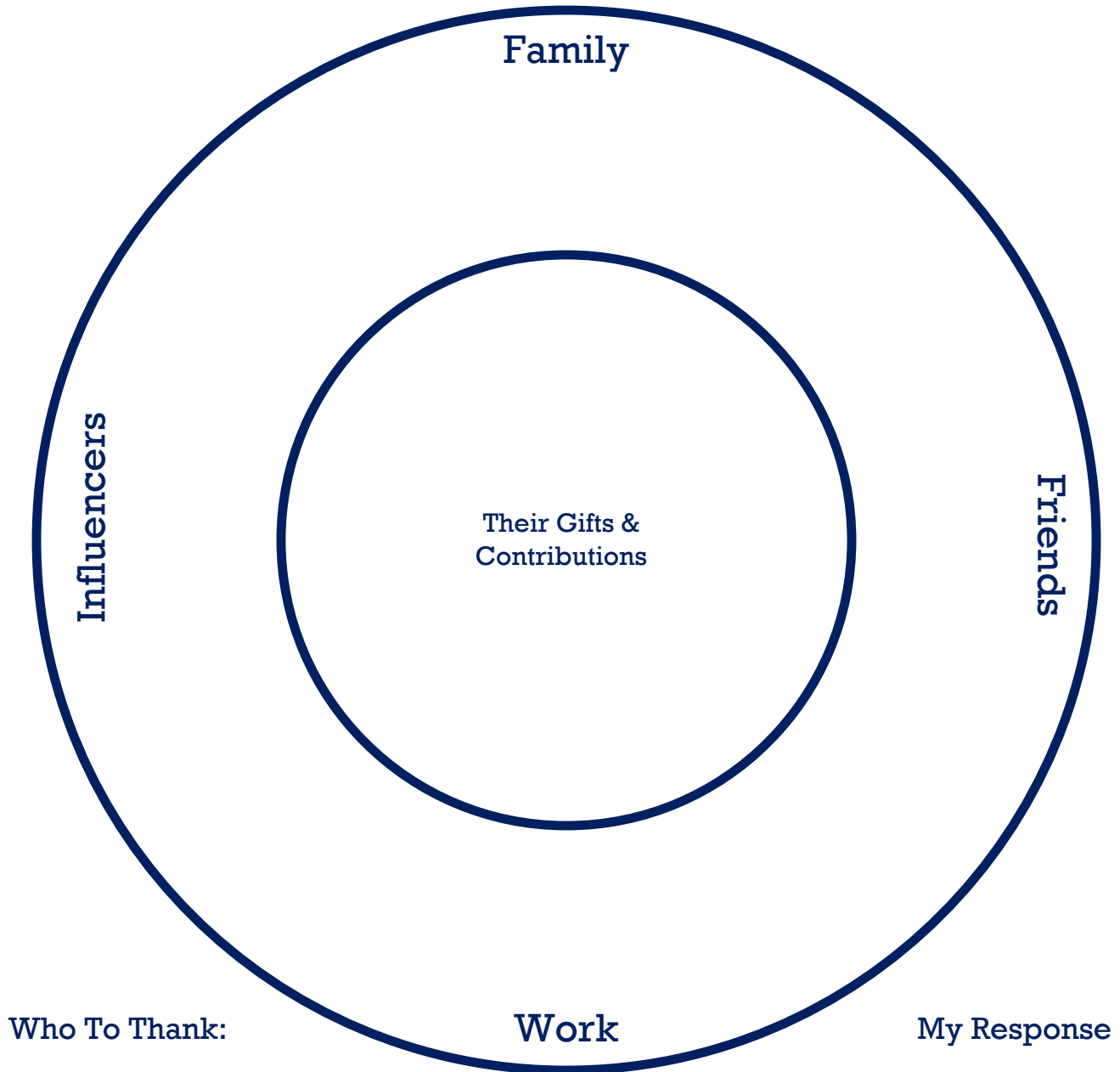
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Join the **Say Thanks Every Day social network** at <http://bit.ly/b4b5AN>

The Circle of Thanks

A Say Thanks Every Day Weekly Planning Guide



The Give Back Two Step

A Say Thanks Every Day Planning Guide

Step One: Say Thanks Every Day



Step Two: Give Back in Grateful Service

Who, in my Life & Work, has made a Difference that Matters?

What Opportunities Do I Have to Give Back In Grateful Service?

Make Welcome

A Say Thanks Every Day Planning Guide



We Invite You to

- **Connect with Us**
- **Share New Ideas**
- **Initiate Projects**
 - **Take the Lead**
- **Share Your Vision**
- **Welcome Others**
- **Contribute Your Best Work**
- **Make a Difference That Matters**
 - **Say Thanks Every Day**
 - **Give Back in Service**

Practice Open Hospitality

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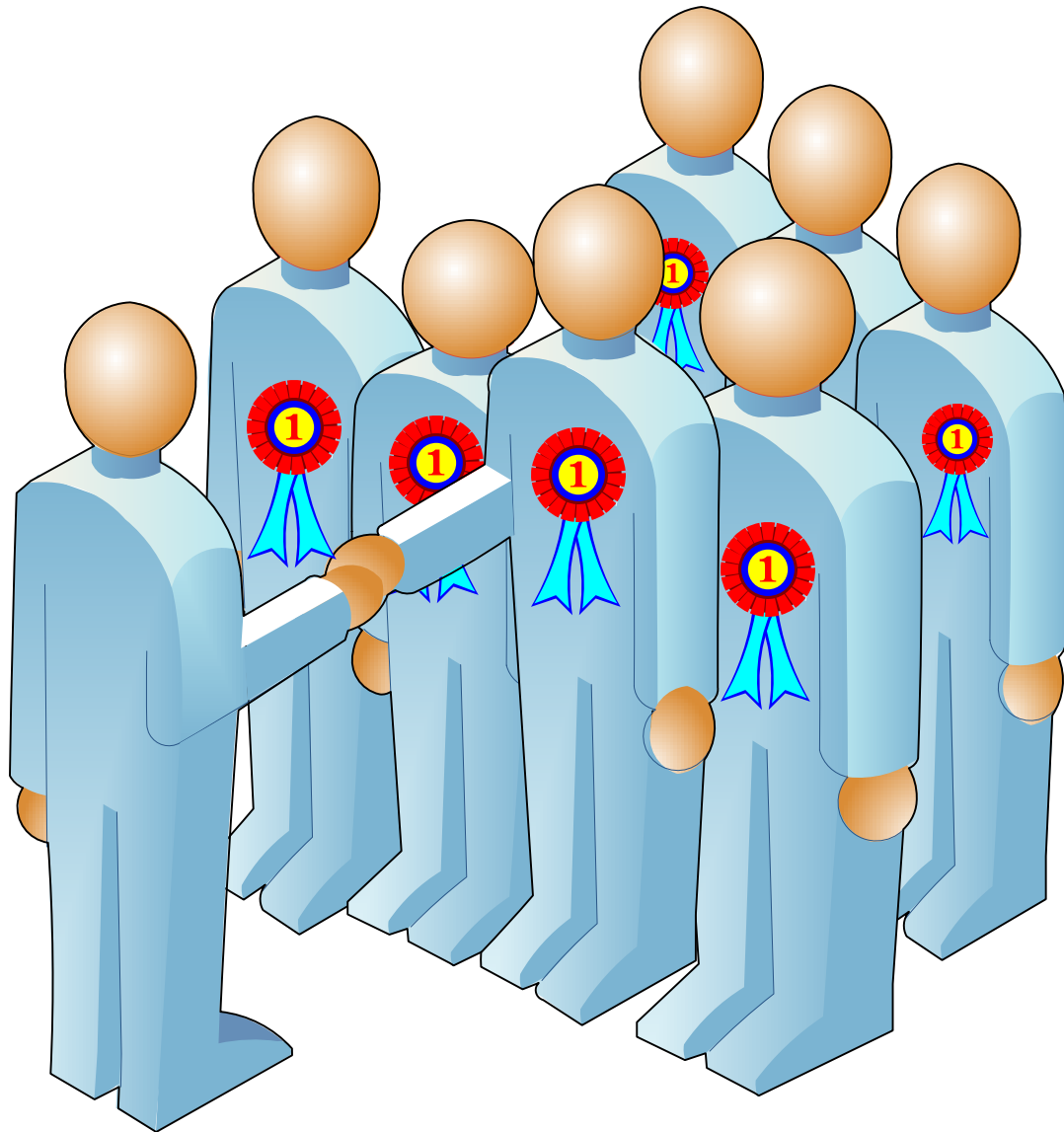
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Honor Others

A Say Thanks Every Day Planning Guide



To Honor Others

Give Respect

Practice Good Will

Recognize Contribution

Appreciate Potential

Develop the Social & Organizations to Support Collaborative Relationships

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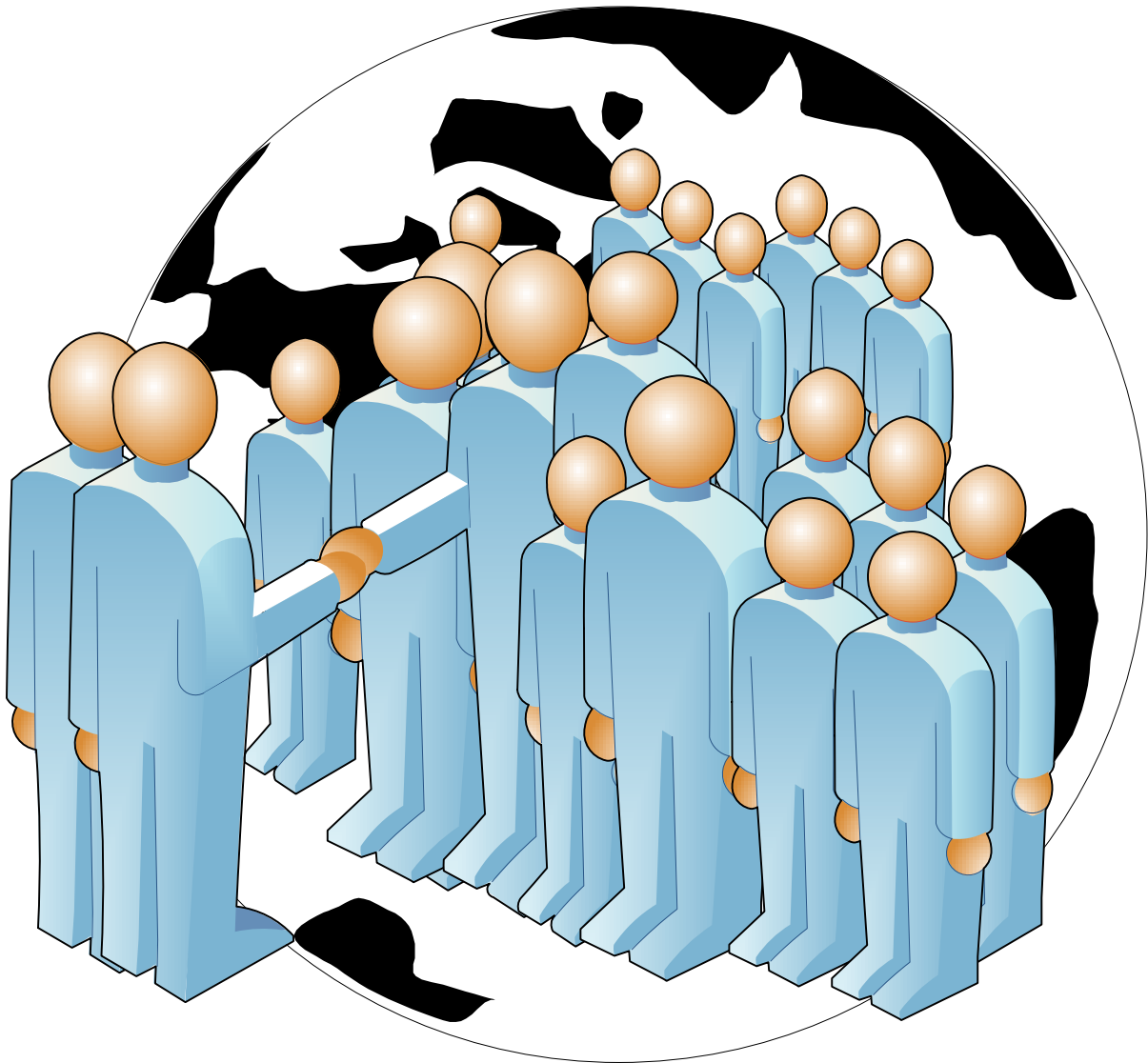
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Create Goodness

A Say Thanks Every Day Planning Guide



Take Initiative to Create
Live Your Purpose in Your Life & Work
Contribute through Collaboration with Others
Lead by Making a Difference that Matters
Discover Well Being, Happiness, Fulfillment and Completeness

The Tree of Gratitude

A Say Thanks Every Day Guide



Creativity Kindness Goodness
Service Open Hospitality Respect Recognition

The Leadership of Shared Responsibility

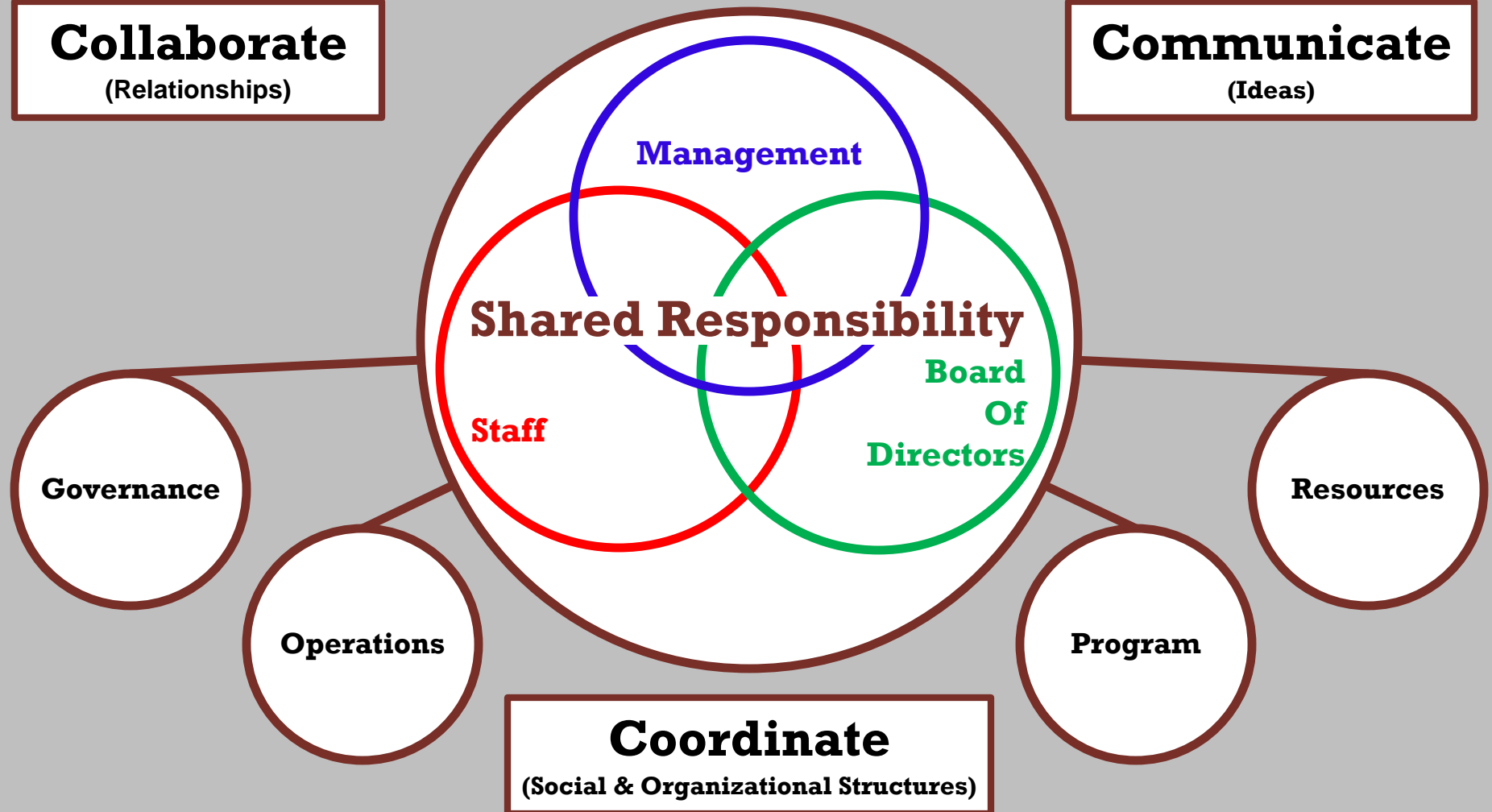
A Circle of Impact Guide

Collaborate

(Relationships)

Communicate

(Ideas)



Communicate with Connecting Ideas (Values, Purpose/Mission, Vision & Impact)

Collaborate with Relationships of Respect, Trust, & Mutual Contribution

Coordinate Organizational Structures to Align with Connecting Ideas & Collaborative Relationships

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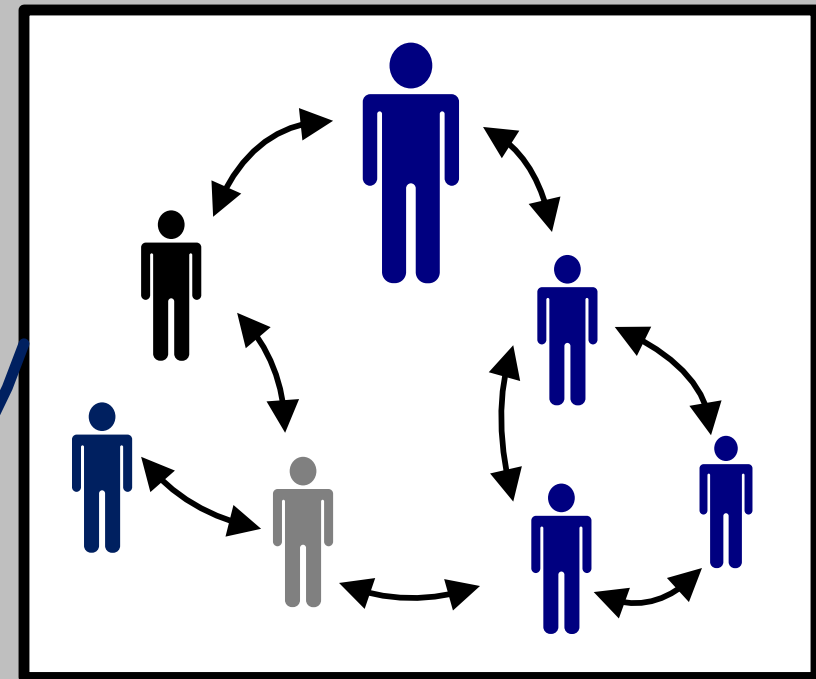
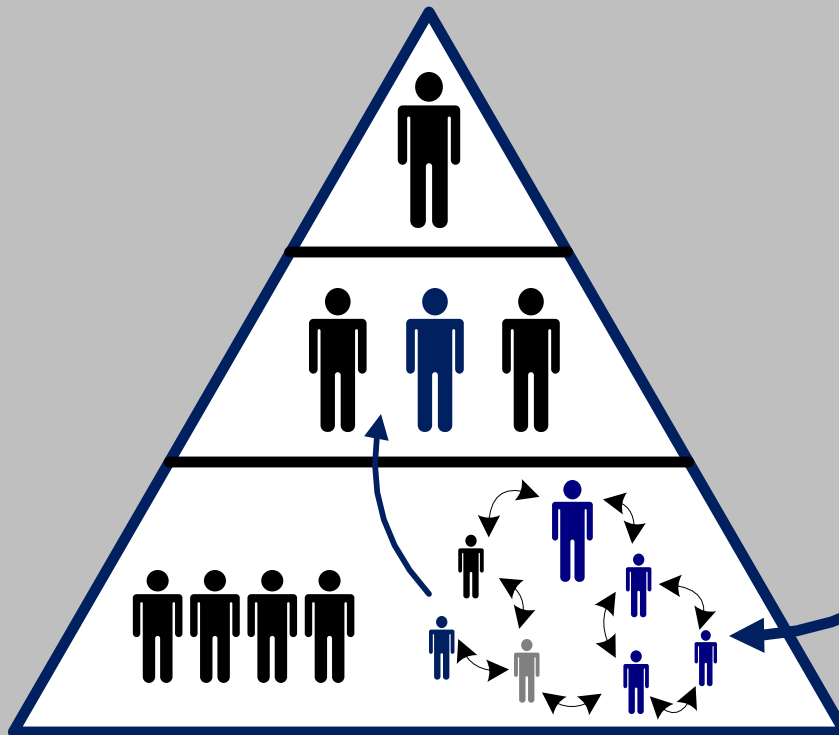
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Leadership in Organizational Structures

Leaders Take Initiative To Create Impact with Ideas, through Relationships, and in Organizational Structures.

The Four Dimensions of an Organizational Structure are Governance, Products, Operations, and Resources.



Hierarchical, Vertically Integrated, Compartmentalized

Collaborative, Self-Organizing, Personally Connected

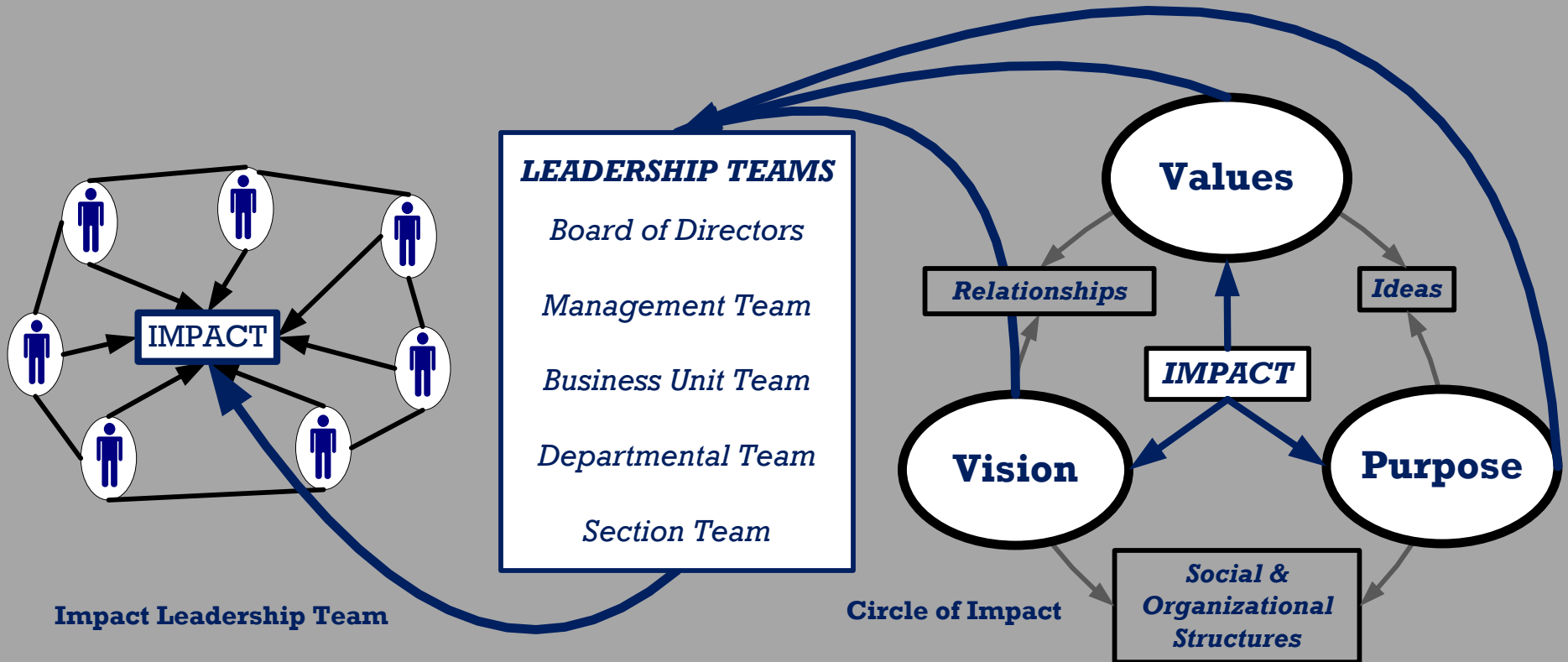
Leadership: Based on Authority and Position

Leadership: Shared Responsibility

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Creating a Culture of Impact through The Connecting Ideas

A Circle of Impact Guide



Steps to Creating a Culture of Impact

Ask: "What do The Connecting Ideas – Purpose, Values, Vision, & Impact – mean for our team?"

Ask: "Where do we see these Ideas working or not working in our team?"

Ask: "What changes do we need to make to align the Purpose, Values, Vision, & Impact of our team for improved Communication, Collaboration and Coordination?"

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