



The Politics of Hope E-zine “*Helping Ordinary Citizens Become Extraordinary Public Leaders*”



Two Styles of Leadership

By Donna Zajonc
August 2008

What qualities make a great leader? Many leadership development programs teach "Transactional Leadership" that emphasizes decisive mental models using data to prove a point. "Generative Leadership" springs from the inner work of the individual leader and is rarely taught in graduate schools.

Transactional Leadership is about measured visions based upon certainty and what has worked in the past. Generative Leadership is about asking bold questions while being willing and able to hold the tension of "not knowing" while new possibilities emerge.

Transactional Leadership is solution-focused and individualistic while Generative Leadership leans into the unknown while developing trusting relationships that empower the many rather than the few.

Transactional Leadership is more top-down while Generative Leadership builds from the bottom up. Transactional Leadership uses the head while Generative Leadership taps our intuition and heart.

Great leaders have learned how to integrate and nurture both types of leadership. Most of us lead from one style more than another and must do the hard work of cultivating the style of leadership that we may not naturally possess.

Transactional Leaders must learn to be more open to Generative styles of leading while Generative Leaders must learn to stay focused on producing results.

Most leadership programs and many of the best-selling "how to" leadership books teach the Transactional Leadership style. They emphasize the leader's thinking style, analytical abilities, ambitions, decisiveness and work habits. Evaluating a person's Transactional Leadership qualities might be based upon:

- Can this leader manage budgets, complex projects and timelines?
- Does the leader have strong analytical skills?
- Are they an expert problem solver?
- Is the leader decisive?

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- Does the leader dress for success and present a professional presence?
- Is the leader a hard worker?

Most MBA programs teach their students how to think and act decisively, analyze the numbers and do scenario planning. The stuff of Transactional Leadership is primarily about analyzing the past in order to pave a path to the future. It is about possessing great thinking skills and answering questions.

Transactional Leaders are efficient, productive, multi-tasking and hard-working leaders. All these traits are essential and have helped build our modern society. The next stage of leadership programs must incorporate the inner dimension of leadership, or the attributes often called Generative Leadership.

Generative leadership is based upon developing the art of the inquiry more than determining the exact answer. **Leaders who embody Generative Leadership understand that the quality of the question is often more important than searching for the one perfect answer. Searching for an answer to the wrong question will most certainly waste resources and delay action on the urgent challenges.**

Generative Leaders may ask questions such as:

- What is working, or, what wants to emerge given the situation?
- What can we learn from this challenge or situation?
- Where are we stuck, or, what is not working?
- What do we know, or, what is the truth of the situation?
- Who are the stake-holders and how do we get them all to the table?

Generative Leaders understand that their individual perspective is limited by the lens of their own personal experiences. Creating possibilities and new opportunities requires tapping the brilliance of the many - with their diverse perspectives - rather than the few.

During challenging times, many people may call Generative Leaders soft or too general. When companies or nations are struggling, people want immediate results and may be attracted to the message of a Transactional Leader.

When citizens are in a visionary mood, Transactional Leaders may be criticized for being too mechanical or lacking heart. The public may yearn for a leader who challenges them with provocative questions and new bold new visions.



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Few leaders today have both sets of skills and use both their brains and hearts. Even our most celebrated political leaders lean toward one style or another. During the Presidential Primary race, Senators Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama exhibited these two dimensions of leadership.

Senator Clinton tended to be a more intellectually focused, solution-oriented candidate whose experience allowed her to have a proposal for almost every problem---traits of a Transactional Leader.

Senator Obama exhibits more Generative Leadership qualities when he says, "Our future is based upon our ability to work together and look for possibilities we have not seen before." His "Yes We Can" slogan touts his ability to get diverse groups to work together to solve any issue. Hence he is often criticized for not having specific proposals.

Senator John McCain tends toward a more Transactional style of leadership, especially on military issues. On the other hand, he has worked hard to create an image of a "maverick" which would point more toward a Generative Leadership style. It is sometimes difficult to discern his predominant style. As the fall Presidential election cycle unfolds, you may want to reflect on what style of leadership you most want in the next President of the United States.

Most important, what style of leadership best describes you? Are you happy with that style or would you benefit from more integration of both styles?

The urgent challenges we face in our country and the world today are bursting with complexity and serious consequences. All leaders must integrate their leadership with both Transactional and Generative styles of leadership to lead us through these chaotic times.



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