



# The Politics of Hope Newsletter

*“Helping Ordinary Citizens Become  
Extraordinary Public Leaders”*



## The Four Kinds of Knowledge

By Donna Zajonc

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A few years back someone asked me, “How can we come to know what we don’t know?” I said, “Huh?” I was sure she was asking me an unsolvable riddle. I thought for a moment and realized it was a very serious question.

She was hinting at the idea that there are different kinds of knowledge. If you understand what type of knowledge you are seeking you will then know what to listen for, what you must learn and what action is necessary.

I have learned that there are four kinds of knowledge:

1. What you know
2. What you identify that you don’t know
3. What you are not aware of that you don’t know and
4. What you do not recognize that you know

Whew! Did you get all that?

Let’s break apart each one and see what the implications are for leaders.

(1) What you know is pretty easy. You know your name. You know your street address, your Social Security number and how much you weigh (well maybe not exactly but pretty close!). Leaders usually operate comfortably every day from this type of knowledge. Sometimes it is a challenge to tell the truth about the facts and see them for what they are, but most of us are clearly aware of what we know.

**Leadership Tip:** Operating primarily from this type of knowledge means that you will see solutions only from your perspective. If this is the primary way you approach a challenge, it is essential for you to expand your interests well beyond your current perspective. Try a new hobby or travel to a different culture to expand your awareness.

(2) What you identify that you don’t know. This one should be pretty simple also. I know about heart surgery and I know that I am not a heart surgeon. I know about building bridges and I know I have no idea how to build a bridge. I know about these things and I am aware that I don’t know how to do them.

Most successful leaders admit when they don’t know something. If not, an inability to admit when you need help will limit your effectiveness right out of the box. Coming across to others as an expert when you



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actually have a limited knowledge of the issue, will set you up for failure. Others will eventually see that you are misrepresenting yourself.

**Leadership Tip:** Leaders must be honest about what they know and don't know. Letting on to others that you know something that you don't is very dangerous, especially in high stake situations. Admit not knowing to yourself and to others up front. Become curious and learn if the situation requires that you learn.

The next two kinds of knowledge become much trickier to understand and apply.

(3) What you aren't aware that you don't know. How can you become aware of something that you don't know? That seems impossible and in a way it is impossible with your current level of thinking. You get what you ask for, based upon the mentality of your request.

How did the Wright Brothers know that heavier than air flight was possible? Automobiles had not been invented yet so how did they think they could fly? Impossible! They didn't know that humans could fly but they dedicated their life to its possibility.

How do you know the solution that you haven't yet discovered that will transform a challenge you are facing? Haven't we all said, "Well if I had known that before I started I would have done things differently" or, "hindsight is 20/20." What if the Wright brothers had waited until they knew for certain how to fly?

Leaders today have very little wiggle room. The stakes are high and the challenges are coming fast. Seeking information that you aren't aware of is essential. Innovation, new possibilities and creative ideas are born in this kind of knowing.

**Leadership Tips:** The first step is asking a different set of questions. Here are a few suggestions:

- ◆ What am I not considering that I should be considering?
- ◆ What question should I be asking that I am not asking?
- ◆ What am I missing?
- ◆ What wants to emerge that is new, bold, better or different?

These are good questions ONLY if you surround yourself with people who do not think like you do and who challenge the status quo and "current knowledge." If you have people who come at challenges with different styles and thinking patterns than you do, their questions will expose what you can not see.

Becoming comfortable with diversity of opinion, inviting stakeholders to the table that think and perceive differently than you do and becoming curious about what you don't know will help you see the impossible.

(4) What you do not recognize that you know. Have you ever known "in your gut" that you knew something but then suppressed the feeling? Many leaders operate only from their intellect and will not make a decision unless they have the facts. They deny that they really know the direction or answer even though they can't explain it to themselves or others. They are waiting for absolute certainty which may stymie them from moving forward.



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When I coach clients I often hear, “I don’t know how to do that” or “I don’t know what I want.” I often reply, “If you did know, what would you say?” Invariably they immediately say, “I would do this or that.” They do know but they do not recognize that they actually do know what they want.

**Leadership Tip:** Listen to your deep, intuitive voice. You know more than you think you know. Have confidence in yourself and when you hear an inner voice say, “I don’t know,” listen and ask yourself, “If I did know, what would it be?”

Each kind of knowledge is a fascinating inquiry into who we are and our approach to leadership. Understanding which kind of knowledge you are utilizing will give you clues about new questions to ask, how to listen to your internal dialogue, who to include in your inner circle of fellow leaders, and how to take action even when you think you don’t know what you **do** know!



## Comments?

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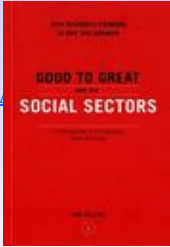


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## On Donna’s Night Stand



### *Good to Great in the Social Sectors*

By: Jim Collins

This book takes the "Good to Great" concepts found in Collins highly successful business book and applies them to the social sector. Collins creates a language of greatness for the social sector that can assist all leaders in the not-for-profit domain.

### Quote of the Month

"Great business corporations share more in common with great social sector organizations than they share with mediocre businesses. The key question is not business versus social but great versus good."

~Jim Collins

from his book:

*Good to Great in the Social Sectors*

*"Donna has provided me with a wide array of tools to lead my organization through economic and personal challenges. I highly recommend her services for those leaders who want to grow into new leadership models."*

*Executive Director of a Land Conservancy*

### *Coaching Opportunity*

*I have room for two new coaching clients. You may be ready to experience the added power-boost that working with a coach might provide in both your work and personal life. If so, contact me for a complimentary coaching session. I look forward to hearing from you. Please email me [donna@bainbridge.net](mailto:donna@bainbridge.net) or call me at 206-780-9300.*



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