

Cultivating Our Capacity for **Compassion**

You look into your own heart, discover what gives pain, and then refuse under any circumstances to inflict that pain on anybody else. Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you. If we did that consistently - all day, every day - then we would gradually leave ourselves behind, because compassion requires you to dethrone your self from center of your world and put another there. P. 56

Awareness of pain is an important part of the way that we develop a compassionate mind and heart. We need to recognize our pain and allow the pain of others to affect us- to enter our lives and disturb our thoughts. P. 59 The Golden Rule requires us to recognize our own pain so that we will not inflict such pain on other people. P. 58

The work of compassion has to begin with ourselves. We cannot seriously ask our church leaders, our political leaders, or indeed our enemies to behave more tolerantly and compassionately if we ourselves give way to unexamined prejudice. The great Confucian sage Sunzi said that every single man and woman in the street has the power to become sage - a compassionate, fully mature human being. --Karen Armstrong, *The Golden Rule. Shambala Sun, March, 2011, P. 59.*

Hidden Treasures Made Manifest

Conversational

Stepping Stones

Manifesting

Compassion

in our

Character at Work



In your lunch conversations, please consider the quotes from *Character at Work* and questions both located below. Consider them and other ideas you have gleaned from O'Brien's book in weaving connections you are finding among O'Brien's work on character and Armstrong's work on compassion.

From O'Brien, *Character at Work*

Localness is a spirit, a way of life that grows out of personal conviction and that is made possible by acceptance of individual responsibility and self-direction P. 38

Internally generated motivation builds capacities such as creativity, ingenuity, and relationship building skills - all which spring from self motivation. P. 43

As people mature personally, they achieve a healthy balance between focus on self and focus on others. Thus they become more able and eager to take responsibility for helping others and to contribute to something larger. Mature individuals also find it easier to resolve conflicts, they can see things from others perspectives, and their ability to focus on what is best for the company overall prevents them from getting entangled in petty rivalries or narrow problems. P. 43

Conversation Questions

1. Where do you see points of connection, support, elaboration of themes across Armstrong's article on ideas of compassion and O'Brien's ideas about Character at Work?
2. What do you see as essential qualities in the "character" of a compassionate leader?
3. What did you learn from the Armstrong article you want to develop more intentionally in your own life and in the life of Winona?
4. Why is the "power to become a sage- a compassionate, fully mature human being" so important for our life at work, especially in our time?
5. How might this become a community wide journey?

For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended consequence of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself. -- VIKTOR FRANKL

O'Brien's Characteristics of Mature Leaders P 117-121

- 1) *Strong Convictions* One of the most striking characteristics of highly mature people is the degree to which they are guided by strong beliefs and values. They seem to go through a process of opening themselves to ideas, considering them, testing them, and finally deciding whether they want to internalize them and make them a part of their inner core of beliefs and values. These strong convictions give them a sense of direction, enabling them to achieve more than the average person in our society does.
- 2) *Commitments* Highly mature people lead committed lives. Their commitments flow from their beliefs about significant matters: the importance of the family, the way society should work, the way organizations should function. More than most people, they are able to maintain priorities to multiple commitments. Genuine commitment is always to something larger than ourselves. the biggest obstacle to commitment is fear of being vulnerable. Commitment carries certain risks. It brings with it the possibility of failure.
- 3) *Openness* Highly mature people are open. They admit their limitations and reveal their feelings and concerns. They don't feel they have to know everything. And they are good listeners.
- 4) *Free Will* Highly mature people have an inner strength that comes from exercising their free will. All of us started our lives with wills that were free but which, little by little, became enslaved. ... Yet all of us, to one degree or another, find that we no longer possess the freedom to which we were born. The highest exercise of our free will is to maintain harmony between what we believe and what we do. Psychologists tell us that we have an intangible core in our deepest being that is composed of our values, our beliefs, and our convictions. We experience feelings of wholeness and inner harmony when our actions are in alignment with this core. Conversely we are torn apart when our actions are in conflict with our core beliefs and values.
- 5) *Deferred Gratification* Highly mature people make choices that defer gratification. By choosing from future rewards over those within easy reach, they free themselves from the tyranny of the short term and gain greater control over their destinies.
- 6) *Accurate Maps.* Highly mature people possess accurate maps of reality. It is not so much that mature individuals have better information than everyone else, but rather they that they have the knack of putting the same information into better perspective. This is because their lenses are less distorted by the self-delusions that result from clinging to immature styles of adjustment. The immature pay a high price for choosing the safe rut over what is sometimes a scary path of self-examination.
- 7) *Moral Courage* Highly mature people possess moral courage. They have the ability to make tough or unpopular decisions, the strength to tell people what they don't want to hear, and the willingness to ask people to do what they would rather not do. Moral courage is the process we go through every time we risk a penalty in order to achieve a worthwhile goal. It is a necessary way to become liberated and mature. For each of us, the ultimate question this: From the person I now am, how do I become everything I am capable of being?... We take a calculated risk every time we face an issue, do our homework, test the idea in discussions, conclude there are significant benefits at stake, decide that what we are seeking to achieve is consistent with our values and best judgment, and then act on the decision. ... It takes moral courage to make the right choice between the hard and easy, desirable and undesirable, playing safe and being vulnerable.

The Winona Council for Quality has been around for twenty years. I recently went back and looked at an early brochure. I found this quote, *“What excites me most about the quality movement is that when done with understanding and sincere intentions, it supports conditions that are natural for us as humans. We begin to believe in our natural gifts and use them at work and in our relations with our families and community groups. As individuals, we become truly excited and curious learners. Also, TQM can get these talents channeled for the community good”*.

Well a lot of water is over the dam, so to speak, in those twenty years. Many things have been in tried to make quality a natural way of life: Community Celebrations of Quality, Business Education Partnerships and Dinners, Winona As A Learning Community, Winona Working Together(the HBC TV series). In addition ,we’ve provided training or participated in: Deming’s Quality, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Chadwick’s Conflict work, United Way/ County Human Service Learning Cycles, Re-Learning Learning, City of Character, Crucial Conversations, and the Winona Clergy Emerging Practices’ Learning Circle. I wonder how much stuck?

Five years ago, a mixed group of: educators, clergy, human service providers, and a few business people formed- about twenty five participants . It’s called Thrive as we’ve considered what causes us to survive and thrive in the 21st century. Over monthly luncheon meetings, we’ve revisited ideas in the beginning quote about what supports the growth of people. In fact, recently we’ve considered what one author says is a near sacred responsibility in job design to bring out co-workers’ best potential. We also look at what impedes such possibilities.

Last month we watched a short clip on the unveiling of the Charter for Compassion, I’d encourage you to Google. This work is the brainstorm of Karen Armstrong, the world- renowned religious scholar who spoke in the WSU Lyceum series in 2006. She’s been concerned that all the world’s major faith traditions espouse some version of the Golden Rule yet compassion seems to be in short supply in the world today. She compacted a career of scholarship from over a dozen and a half of her books, into an 18 minute speech of a life time at TED, a private non profit noted for its conferences around ideas worth spreading. She won the TED prize for her talk and launched an effort that solicited thousands of people from around the world to make contributions for a draft charter. The final version was composed by a group of notable individuals (the likes of Desmond Tutu), from six faith traditions(Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) .

This is the final paragraph of the Charter: *“We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community”*.

There’s a lot packed in that paragraph that speaks to overcoming rampant polarization whether at a local, state, national or international level in our fractured world today. In helping live out this Charter, Armstrong has penned another book- Twelve Steps to A Compassionate Life. It has a deliberate AA ring, as she says we are addicted to ego. I think she’s dead on. Ego’s pull explains many of the conundrums I’ve seen in the quality movement such as why mistakes can’t be our friends, or why it’s hard for us to see the system and much easier to blame others?

In reaching out internationally ,the Charter has 3 major goals: 1) influencing practicing religions and building interfaith understanding, 2) influencing education so the next generation more naturally practices compassion, and 3) encouraging Cities of Compassion.

Over next few months we’ll be talking more about the Charter for Compassion at Thrive and reaching out within the community to test the waters on whether Winona is ready to become a City of Compassion. I hope it is an idea whose time has come.