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Self Awareness

By Phil Ramsey

Are you looking forward to the year? What do you hope to achieve within your school/centre; what contribution will you make that could really make a difference? It is natural to start off a new year with questions like this. And we want our good intentions to produce something worthwhile. Of course, more than good intentions are needed. Achieving anything worthwhile is going to be a challenge that will require emotional intelligence (EI). (InterLEAD Connector™ recognises the importance of emotional intelligence by considering self-awareness in the competency section.).

Why do we need emotional intelligence when pursuing challenging goals? Take a moment to think about the nature of goals that leaders pursue. Typically, a leader is like a juggler with several balls in the air. If you decide to add an extra ball, you don't have the option of letting the others fall. And some goals seem at odds with one another: you may want to encourage innovation, while making sure that established practices you know are critical to the school/centre don't get tinkered with. You may want students/children to learn to be independent decision-makers, while at the same time building the school/centre's reputation as a safe environment with high standards of discipline.

Important goals are also socially complex. They are not things you can achieve on your own. Rather, success depends on the contributions of a range of people. And while some people applaud your efforts to build independent thinkers, others - whose support you need - think you should be putting more effort into discipline.

So goals are complex and messy. Yet we pursue them. Why? Our goals are important to us. We want to make a difference! Of course, the messiness of the goals and our personal commitment to achieving them, all add up to an emotionally charged whole. Because of this, without sufficient EI we could quit when our frustrations rise too high, or sour important relationships with toxic outbursts.

Self-Awareness and Blind Spots

Like most competencies we may be more or less inclined toward being able to manage our emotions, and at the same time there is plenty we can do to develop our emotional intelligence further. Learning anything requires that we can take a realistic look at our current level of ability compared to where we want to be. And that can be difficult when it comes to EI. As one of our colleagues commented, developing our EI means understanding "what it's like to be on the receiving end of me."

We spend all of our lives inside our own skin. We feel what we feel, and it is easy to assume that is 'normal'. It can be hard to imagine that others react differently to us, have different values, or interact with the world in different ways. Everyone has 'blind spots' when it comes to a making a realistic assessment of themselves. It feels like we are just as 'complete' as everybody else, but that is only because we don't notice some of the important gaps.

It is disconcerting to realise that you have been living with a blind spot, especially when it becomes apparent that everyone else can see what you can't see about yourself! Often we react to the idea with defensiveness and denial. Accepting the reality of the situation usually requires honest feedback in an environment where we feel safe. Sadly, environments like this are rare.

One of the most common ways of seeing what we are like is by noticing the differences between ourselves and others. We may not realise that our own areas of capability are anything special until we realise that others struggle to do what comes easily to us. Likewise, we may think that we are just as good as everyone else at something until we encounter someone who does with ease what takes us real effort. They see things we don't, are sensitised or attuned to signals that just pass us by, and appreciate the importance of variables we might ignore. With effort, we can develop some of the capability they have, but first we have to recognise the difference.

Differences and Getting Things Done

How do differences and self-awareness relate to getting things done? Communication and change expert Adam Kahane (author of 'Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change') has identified a difference that is at the heart of successful change, and needs to be managed thoughtfully for change to stick. According to Kahane, those seeking change need a combination of 'power' and 'love' to achieve anything worthwhile. Unfortunately, as discussed above, we all tended to be dangerously incomplete: for some of us it is natural to exercise power; expressing love is harder to do. And for some the opposite is true: we emphasise love at the expense of power. While we need to express both fully, we tend to ignore one in a way that undermines our best intentions.

So, use this year to enhance your ability to get things done. Rather than jumping into a change process, taking your 'usual' approach, aim to add something extra this year. Take time to reflect on where your capability currently lies, and seek feedback from people you trust. Give particular attention to issues of power and love. Which comes most naturally? Who can you learn from when it comes to your less developed area?

As you get a better understanding of yourself, you'll be more appreciative of the talents of others, and better able to work with them on projects of shared concern.

An Exercise in Self-Awareness

By Phil Ramsey

This exercise comes from Michael Ray, Professor of Creativity and Innovation at Stanford University. Ray believes that each of us has a drive that is unique to us, like a fingerprint. Yet, this is something we often don't explore: it is like a secret we keep from ourselves. If we get to know what that drive is, then we can design it in to the work we do. If we are doing work that doesn't address our drive, we will likely feel dissatisfied and lacking energy. If the drive is present, work becomes personally meaningful. So it is worth understanding.

Try this. You may want to have a partner ask you the questions so you can respond verbally. Or you could do this as a personal exercise, making written notes as you answer the questions.

Answer the following:

1. What was the most meaningful piece of work you have done recently?
2. Describe the work: what was involved?
3. What made it meaningful for you?
4. Summarise your answer to the previous question in one or two sentences.
5. Now distil your answer to the previous question into 3 or 4 words.
6. Find one word that can act as a summary of the elements you have been describing. Keep in mind that, while it is just one word, it can represent all the various facets of your 'fingerprint'.

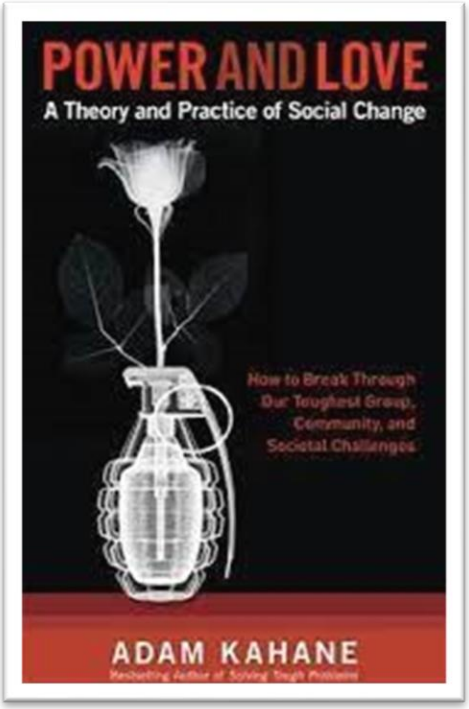
You may want to do this more than once, to see if you come up with the same word. Each time you do, you'll add some richness to your understanding of what makes work meaningful for you. Don't be quick to change the word you have chosen: rather, allow it to grow in what it represents for you.

Now think about a project that you currently find frustrating. Is your drive - represented by your word - missing? What might you do to design it into the project, or give it a more prominent place in your activity? If others are involved in your work, how might you share what you know about your drive with them? How can you help them find their work more meaningful? How will you celebrate what you achieve together?

At times New Zealand culture can be 'tall poppy-ish' encouraging us to downplay uniqueness and minimise differences. Out of balance, this tendency can work at odds with self-awareness. Don't let this undermine your efforts to make work meaningful and achieve important goals in the year ahead.

BOOK REVIEW:
Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter – February 2016

Adam Kahane has worked to bring about change for decades, facilitating conversations between bitter rivals in some of the world's most entrenched conflicts. *In Power and Love* he reflects on what has been missing in some of the 'failed' efforts, and what went right with the successes. As the title of the book suggests, power and love are fundamental drives in humans that need to be reconciled creatively in order to achieve anything of significance.

Power is the drive to make a difference in the world; the drive for self-realisation. Love is the drive to connect with and respect others, to heal and unify divisions. The two drives are deeply connected, in that each can degenerate without sufficient attention to the other. Without love, power to get things done, degenerates into the exercise of abusive power over those who get in the way. According to Martin Luther King, love without power is insipid and anaemic: it degenerates into a quest for unity that prevents people expressing what is really important to them. Of course, when people get it right, fully expressing both drives in the work they do, great things can happen.

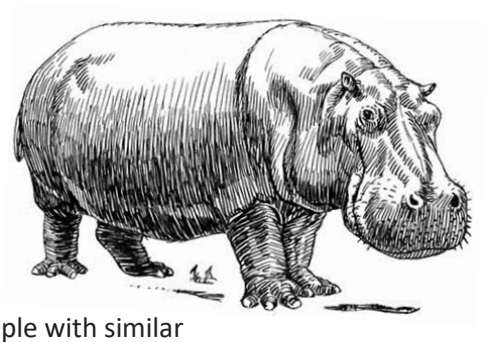
Kahane illustrates the dynamics of power and love, drawing on his experiences with a diverse range of projects with leaders from around the world. He draws on experiences in South Africa, India, Israel and other lands. He reflects on his own drive for power, and shows remarkable self-awareness concerning how it has shaped his practice as a facilitator and, more often than he'd prefer, limited his effectiveness.

The book is also realistic about the challenge of reconciling the two drives. It doesn't come easily. Kahance uses the metaphor of the Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz, trying to learn to walk. Managing the interplay of two legs is difficult, and the Scarecrow initially falls, then stumbles, before eventually walking then skipping. The same progression happens as we learn to manage our conversations. Some are disasters; we just fall. Others have a pronounced limp or stumble, because one drive is over-emphasised. But as we keep at it, we learn to get things in sequence, to dignify both 'legs', and to smooth out the change efforts we make

The interplay of power and love is a critical one for school leaders to understand. While Kahane discusses change at a broad, often international level, the book will provide you with valuable lessons and principles you can use in your school or centre

The Emotional Part of Learning

By Phil Ramsey



The hippopotamus may look docile, but it is reputedly the most dangerous animal amongst Africa's wildlife. And the human 'hippo' is likewise the most dangerous creature in the staffroom. By overturning boats, the hippopotamus causes more human deaths than snakes or lions elephants. But what makes someone a human hippopotamus?

Picture a hippo in your mind. What stands out? A big mouth and small ears! Sadly, you probably know plenty of people with similar features. Particularly as our schools/centres become more diverse and more complex, we need people to break away from any resemblance to the hippo, becoming quick to listen and thoughtful about their speech. What if you want to avoid being a 'human hippo'? A personal quality that will make a big difference is that of empathy.

Empathy features in the competencies we use in InterLEAD Connector™. It is there because it is an essential quality for anyone involved in education. The process of learning is an emotional one; learners need to know that they are safe, that they can put themselves at risk. And we are not just interested in learners we find in classrooms. If we want our staffrooms to be places where colleagues can learn from one another, we need them to be an environment characterised by empathic listening. If I think I am going into a room full of 'hippos' I won't open myself up to professional conversations where I put myself at risk: I'm more likely to be on guard against feedback rather than open to what my colleagues have to say.

Hardwired for Empathy

Empathy is something that should come easily to people. When we notice people in trouble or in need we naturally respond with concern. Of course we also really appreciate when people express empathy toward us: recognising how we are feeling, feeling what we feel, and responding compassionately when we are in distress. This appreciation for empathy isn't an accident. Neuroscience suggests that it is 'hardwired' into us.

But if it is hardwired, why does it seem so uncommon? Why aren't we experiencing empathy constantly? And why do we personally have to work at being empathetic, rather than just expecting it to happen naturally?

Earlier we said that empathy happens naturally when we notice people in trouble. It seems that an increasing challenge is being able to notice what is going on for others. In a world of social media and virtual connections, there may be greater personal distance between us and those we deal with, making it more difficult to really see, for instance, when they are in distress. And this is the danger in being a hippo: if I am busy talking, talking, talking, then my focus will be on myself and I'm unlikely to notice the feelings of someone else. Last, and by no means least, we have trouble noticing the feelings of others because there is so much going on in our own minds. We are bombarded by thoughts, many of them critical about ourselves and others, and this mental activity can easily turn our attention inward, focused on self.

The Paradox of Empathy

According to Bill Ury *(author of 'Getting to Yes With Yourself')* the basis for empathising with others is to "put yourself in your shoes". In order to notice the feelings of others you need to deal with the turbulence in your own mind and heart. Perhaps you've watched what happens to a glass of water immediately after it has been poured. Initially, the water is full of bubbles. Slowly, as the turbulence settles, the water clears and you can see through it. Similarly, if our minds are full of thoughts that agitate us and turn our attention onto ourselves it is difficult to see past our own thinking.

'Putting ourselves in our own shoes' means trying to understand our personal interests, needs and values. What emotions sometimes impinge on our listening? Where do they come from? What do we care about, causing us to feel frustrated when others give it a low priority? You can find out by (1) asking yourself these questions; (2) observing yourself in interactions and noticing how you respond to others; and (3) asking a trusted friend what they have observed.

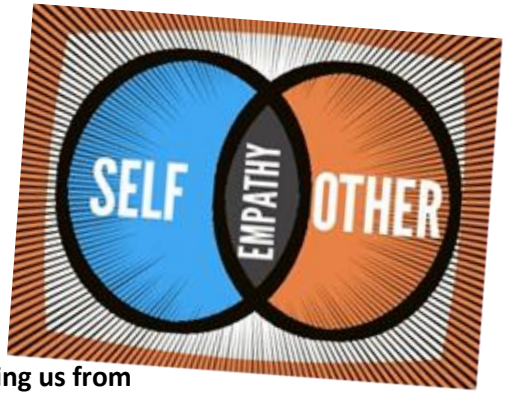
Even the process of observing yourself helps. By acting as an observer whose job is simply to describe your own reaction, you become less likely to judge that reaction. You become too busy noticing what you do to criticise yourself for the reaction. You find yourself thinking things like, "Oh look, I'm feeling angry. Isn't that interesting." And being in this observational role involves less inner turbulence.

Counselling expert Carl Rogers discussed this process, saying "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change." Rather than berating ourselves for a lack of empathy, or trying to force ourselves to care about others, we can take the gentler path suggested by Ury, Rogers and others, then allow our natural instincts for empathy to emerge.

Many people also find that humour enables them to observe themselves without judgement. So while it probably won't be productive to berate colleagues with unsolicited descriptions of their poor listening skills, try spotting them in yourself and saying "Oh look at that: I'm turning into a hippo."

Respect is a Discipline

By Phil Ramsey



Empathy and respect go hand in hand. It is hard to have empathy for someone you cannot respect. This is evident in the human tendency to schadenfreude: the delight we take in the misfortune of someone we don't care about. When someone we don't respect takes a fall, we are more inclined to snicker than to respond with compassionate concern. Yet that reaction often undermines our effectiveness, preventing us from achieving what is really important.

Respect - and the lack of it - is readily communicated whether we intend to or not. People sense when we disrespect them. They notice, for instance, whether we try to control them by telling what they should and should not be doing. They can see whether we are curious about their lives and whether we really pay attention when they are listening. They notice whether our interactions with them are nourishing or toxic. And all of this impacts on the quality of the interactions we have.

Many people feel that there is little they can do. If someone hasn't earned our respect, perhaps they even keep giving us reason to disrespect them, it feels as if we should treat them the way they have treated us. Reciprocation appeals to our sense of justice.

As a teacher you may have learned from experience that you need to earn the respect of students/children, and that respect earned with one group doesn't carry over to another; earning respect is an on-going challenge. But does that mean that people have to earn your respect? After all, you are an adult and you've learned to make choices that influence how you think and act. You can choose to give people respect, making it a discipline you practice, whether it has been earned or not.

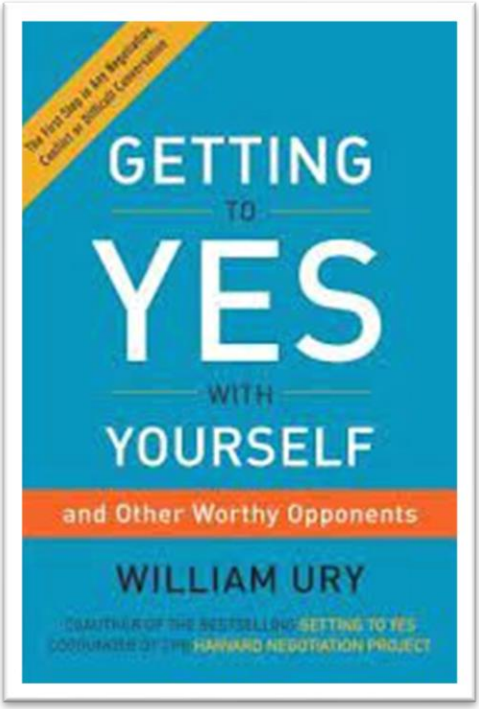
Abraham Lincoln had a very different view his opponents to that of many politicians. He claimed he set out to "destroy his enemies… by turning them into friends." He did this by deliberately showing them respect, considering the merit in what they had achieved and the value of their perspectives even when these differed considerably from his own.

We can respect others whether or not we approve of their behaviour or lifestyle choices. Bill Ury suggests that respect does not come from what the other person does; rather it is an expression of our own attitude. And we can set out to expand our 'circle of respect'. Think about a person or a group you struggle to respect. Think about the choices they are making and what might account for their views. How does their perspective differ from your own? Then consider, aren't they exercising their right to choose for themselves: and isn't that a right you personally value?

Asking the questions in the previous paragraph changes the relationship you have to the other. By asking, you'll already be displaying curiosity, one of key ingredients of a respectful relationship. And you may find you break out of a vicious circle of disrespect that limits your thinking and action, allowing you to feel empathy and creating new possibilities for how you work.

BOOK REVIEW:
Getting to YES with Yourself

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter – May 2016

William (Bill) Ury is an expert on negotiation, based on years of research, teaching and practice. His practice includes representing businesses and governments in some major conflicts, and he draws on his experience in all his writing. He was author of *Getting to Yes*, a book that revolutionised the field of negotiation. He has observed, though, that not everyone can apply the lessons it contains: while many have success, others struggle to put ideas into practice. What makes the difference? Ury has concluded that those who struggle are typically those who have not 'got to yes' with themselves: they struggle with an internal negotiation that prevents them from being effective when in negotiation with others. *Getting to Yes With Yourself* is about how we can negotiate with our 'worthiest opponent': ourselves.

All of us are conflicted, with competing interests and desires that mean we struggle to be coherent and reasonable. Often what we do is at odds with the standards or principles we espouse. Hence, we may say about ourselves, "I am my own worst enemy." The book is all about turning yourself from an opponent into an ally.

A feature of Ury's writing stems from his experience as a teacher. In all his books he strives to make ideas 'teachable'. Rather than giving broad, abstract advice he outlines skills that we can practice; skills he has thought about and researched over years to ensure they make a real difference to people. And, as mentioned above, he effectively illustrates what the skills involve by drawing on some fascinating experiences from a range of contexts. *Getting to Yes With Yourself* considers how to 'put yourself in your own shoes', how to reframe situations, how to communicate respect in conversation, and other critical skills.

Ury is a wonderful writer and we thoroughly recommend you read any of his books. He is also a model for anyone interested in how to grow through personal reflective practice. His first book was a runaway success; laurels that most people would be proud to rest on. Yet, both with this book, and with *The Power of a Positive No* readers can see how he has considered what was missing in his earlier work, made it the subject of serious inquiry, and produced work that adds significant value.

Leaders who Listen

By Phil Ramsey

Listening is a skill that is universally experienced and appreciated. We have been around listeners, good and bad, all our lives. We've noticed when we have been listened to, had feedback that we weren't listening, struggled to listen to boring speeches, and made efforts to listen with care to important messages.

By now we should all be fantastic listeners; yet that clearly isn't the case. In the last issue of *In the Moment* we featured the importance of empathy and its close connection to good listening. The article touched a chord, with lots of feedback expressing how (1) educators really value empathy and good listening, and (2) they only rarely get to experience it. In this issue, we will dig a little deeper to work out what is going on and what it takes to develop empathy that others appreciate.

To begin with, do a quick evaluation of your ability to listen. Would you rate yourself as above or below average? If we divided the population into deciles on the basis of their listening (1 being dreadful, 10 being exceptional), into which decile would you fall? Give yourself a rating before you read on.

Listening and Self-Assessment

Making an accurate self-assessment of listening turns out to be very difficult for a couple of important reasons. Firstly, it is closely connected to what is for most people an important "identity" issue. We want to think of ourselves and be known as caring, lovable people, so it matters to us whether we are good listeners or not. Try asking young people (and the not-so-young) to self-assess their driving ability or their sporting prowess, issues that are similarly connected to identity. I've tried this with large under-graduate classes at university. Typically, close to 100% rate themselves as "above average" drivers or sportspeople; often around half manage to squeeze themselves into the top 10% of the population. In the same way, the vast majority of people rate themselves as above average listeners.

A second important factor affecting self-assessment is that most of us hold simplistic or inaccurate ideas about what "good listening" is. If we think of good listening as "spotting the flaws in other's arguments" or as "not talking when others speak, while indicating interest" we will limit ourselves when it comes to development.

Think about what it takes to develop your skill at listening. If you think you are already a great listener (on the basis of flawed criteria and unrecognised identity issues) you may not see any point in working to improve. And even if you did decide to practice your skills, a flawed model of good listening might cause you to practice things that make little difference, or may even make you a worse listener!

Getting it Right

Leadership development experts Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman have made an effort to help us get listening right. To begin, they identified leaders who ranked in the top 5% of listeners, as rated by others taking part in 360-degree assessments. They then compared the behaviour of these exceptional listeners (as judged by others) with the behaviour of average listeners. Some results were a surprise: for instance, good listeners tended to make suggestions, and were not necessarily silent when others were talking. Zenger and Folkman have been putting their findings together into a more robust model of what good listening involves.

A key to good listening is to understand that it is not a discrete skill: one that should be separated off from 'talking'. Rather, both are necessary parts of conversation. People who were rated exceptional as listeners were those who engaged in an active dialogue in which both parties were active participants in a cooperative, rather than competitive, conversation. Leaders were considered empathic listeners when they actively took part in a conversation about the other person's concern, without taking control of the issue, attempting to win an argument, or making it all about themselves.

Developing good listening skill sometimes takes a change of metaphor. Zenger and Folkman explain that if we think of listening as "being an absorbent sponge" we will be less active in conversations and less likely to help people get what they really want. As a metaphor, they suggest we think of ourselves as "trampolines", something others can bounce off, while energising them so they can reach higher and higher.

Further, good listening can be thought of as a staged process, or a hierarchy. Rather than describe it in detail, here is a brief outline. It starts with a foundation, of creating a safe environment in which challenging issues can be addressed. If that stage is addressed effectively, the listener can increasingly understand and authentically validate the emotions and values that are being expressed. And doing that allows a listener to ask questions that challenge and prompt the other to test out assumptions, and to make suggestions that are treated as insightful and valuable.

Listening Practice

This is a staged process, in that some actions by a leader - such as trying to validate emotions or make suggestions - just don't work unless the earlier stages have been cared for. Which means that being a good listener isn't simply something you can do in a one-off interaction; more often, it is part of a relationship that you build over time.

Listening is a key skill associated with empathy. Like empathy is developed through interactions. It needs to be built over time with attention and practice, along with openness to the feedback you are receiving from others either directly or indirectly. It is worth the effort. People want you to be empathic and will flourish if you make the effort to build this vital capacity.

‘Valencing’: Skilled Incompetence for Empathy

By Phil Ramsey

Empathy is a product of emotional intelligence. All of us have an emotional life, and we need to deal intelligently with our emotions if we are going to harness their power and build stronger relationships. While this may seem obvious to many, some of the ways we think about emotions can hinder our efforts to deal with them intelligently. Author Karla McLaren (author of ‘The Art of Empathy’) suggests that ‘valencing’ is an idea that confuses many people and can block the development of emotional intelligence and the empathy that results. So, what is valancing?

The term refers to our tendency to categorise things as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, categories that are often applied to emotions. Every emotion has a different impact: happiness, for instance, makes us more convivial, makes our minds work faster and can open us up to optimistic risk-taking. Sadness, on the other hand, makes us more inclined to withdraw, slow down and think pessimistic thoughts. From the sound of it, happiness is positive, while sadness is antisocial and negative.

Thinking this way, according to McLaren, can lead to ideas like: we should work only with the positive emotions, and suppress the negative; if we feel a ‘negative emotion’ like sadness, we should feel bad about that, adding guilt into the mix of emotions we feel; and rather than truly empathise with those experiencing a negative emotion, we should encourage them to be more positive. Let’s take a closer look at emotions, and we can get a clearer sense of McLaren’s views.

While the impact of an emotion like sadness may seem undesirable, sometimes slowing down, being pessimistic and recognising that things need to change is exactly what we need. Context, not the emotion itself, determines whether what we feel is positive or negative. Every emotion can be inappropriate if experienced too dramatically or expressed at an inappropriate time. A funeral, for instance, is not the time to express delirious happiness; contented satisfaction is not what we need to be feeling if we are unprepared as we approach a critical deadline.

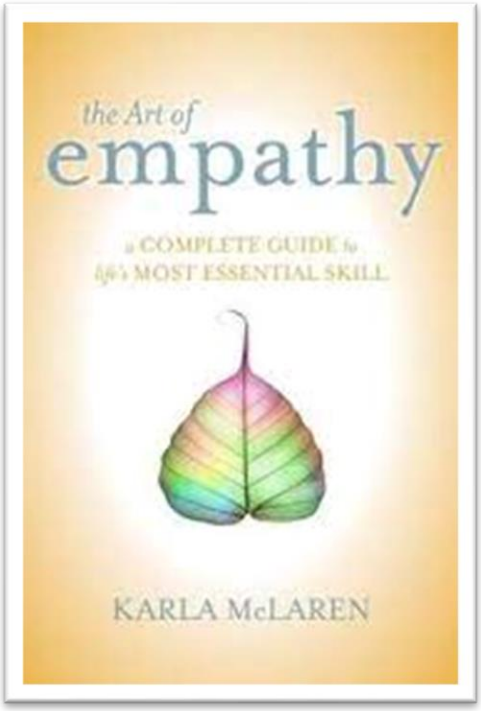
Emotions - including those that seem negative - all act as signals, telling us of actions we need to take. Initially, these signals may be quiet and easily ignored. When an important deadline is a long way off anxiety acts as a gentle nudge that prompts us to prepare. If we procrastinate the signal gets stronger and stronger. Eventually it may turn to panic.

Viewed this way, anxiety is not something to be avoided, suppressed or ignored. Dealing with it intelligently involves identifying it early, when it is just a glimmer, understanding it, recognising what it is calling on us to do, then if necessary acting on it. We can develop the ability to do all these things when we interact with people, conscious of the emotions we experience, giving attention to the decisions we make, and learning for the consequences we experience.

Emotional intelligence can seem a lot like wine-tasting. You might have sniffed at a wine wondering how other people detect “leather” or “blueberries” in the aroma, perhaps even suspecting that they, like you, can’t really smell anything specific. As you make the effort to accurately name what you can smell, your sensitivity increases, you notice more and you enjoy the wine in new ways. Being sensitive to emotions similarly takes persistent effort, which you are more likely to do if you avoid the trap of valancing.

BOOK REVIEW:
The Art of Empathy

By Phil Ramsey



'In the Moment' Newsletter – August 2016

In an effort to dig deeper into what empathic leadership involves, I've been reading Karla McLaren's book *The Art of Empathy*. I'm used to reviewing books that I have enjoyed reading and which I am confident that others will be able to read with pleasure. I've found this book valuable and thought-provoking, I'm impressed with the insight that Karla has into people's emotional lives, and I'm keen to learn from what else she has to say. At the same time I don't enjoy the style in which it is written and how densely packed it is with suggestions for practice, many of which involve repetition of key themes. She also employs a stream of parenthetical asides to the reader which I found distracting. All in all, the book was useful but hard-going.

The book begins by looking closely at what empathy involves, and provides a useful analysis of aspects of empathy that all need to be given attention if it is to be skilfully expressed. As an educator I found this a valuable contribution. Knowing how empathy happens makes it 'teachable'. Her model helps to crystalize the sensitivities and skills a learner might need to develop. Similarly, the discussion of ideas like 'valency', which can get in the way of empathy, was new and interesting, prompting me to reconsider how I talk about emotions when I teach about leadership.

The book is a handy reference, in that Karla draws on excellent work by other authors, concepts she has tested out in terms of their effectiveness in helping her with emotional challenges she has faced, and which have proved useful in work with counselling clients. To me these often helped clarify things about which I had vague ideas or hunches, or made good sense discussing ideas that were new to me.

The Art of Empathy sets out to provide readers with both challenge and support as they learn to be empathic. It dances between providing being an evidence-based guide to good empathic practice and a new age self-help philosophy. The danger with such books is that they can easily "fall between two stools" rather than sitting comfortably on either. I suspect, though, that is always going to be a challenge for people who want to write about empathy.

Sustaining Generosity

By Phil Ramsey

A recent news item caught my attention. Under the headline "Generous or Stingy" the presenters asked "Are we (New Zealanders) as generous as we like to think we are?" They went on to present the results of a small social science experiment they had conducted. They had filmed while an actor, pretending to be homeless, approached people asking for a hand out of food. The item was based on a similar experiment carried out in Denmark, where richer people consistently turned down the actor, where homeless people who were approached were more likely to share what they had.

You can breathe a sigh of relief. On the basis of this experiment, based on a simplistic understanding of generosity, a tiny sample and a non-rigorous design, we learned that New Zealanders are more generous than the Danes. National pride can remain intact.

Despite the limitations of the research, the piece was thought-provoking. Generosity is an important issue for school/centre leaders to consider. We rely on people - teachers especially - to be generous toward students/children, willing to give of their time, effort and concern. At the same time, we need to be concerned with the phenomenon of "donor fatigue", where naturally generous people burnout because of increasing demands that they give and give. We don't want to see generous and empathetic teachers leaving education because they have been worn out by the experience.
A healthy school/centre depends on sustainable generosity.

The news item encouraged a very simple understanding of the issues. You are either generous or stingy. If you are generous you'll give to anyone asking for help. If you don't give, you are stingy and should feel ashamed of yourself; in fact, you should probably move to Denmark where you would fit in more than you do here in New Zealand. Further, the reality was that the experiment involved people being scammed. The actor wasn't homeless and hungry; he was lying about how needy he was. Evidently, viewers should admire those people who are taken in by someone playing on their generosity.

Some fascinating research helps clarify what is involved in sustainable generosity. 'Reciprocity Theory' enables us to get a more balanced view of giving, one that protects against donor fatigue.

Givers, Takers and Matchers

Researcher Adam Grant *(author of 'Give and Take')* explains that each of us has a theory of how reciprocity should work in our lives. Many people are 'matchers': they think that what they give should be matched by what they receive in return. They have an innate sense of fairness, thinking that things should balance out over time. Others are 'takers': they think that it is important to get more than you give. They are more likely to view life as a competition, and get pleasure from coming out ahead of others. And there are 'givers': those who think it is right to give whether or not there is any payback. They are likely to believe that there is more happiness in giving than receiving, so being generous is a more personally rewarding way to live.

When researchers began exploring differences between these groups they uncovered something intriguing. They found that you could divide 'givers' into two groups based on their approach to generosity. One of those groups had the highest levels of reported happiness: that is, their

happiness was higher than matchers and takers. Yet the other group of givers were the least happy of anyone surveyed. What was the difference?

The unhappy group, who were also more likely to burnout and experience donor fatigue, have a selfless approach to giving. They feel guilty if they did not give generously to anyone asking. This approach leads to them feeling they have to spread their generosity thin and to give beyond what they can truly manage.

The happy group, who were also able to sustain their giving, take what Grant calls an *other-ish* approach to generosity. They are inclined to be generous to others, yet do so with a strong sense of personal determination. They view themselves as having choice about how they give, how much they give, and who they give to. They give with a sense of purpose based on their values, so while they give as much as the selfless group, they choose where they give in order to have an impact on something they care about.

You may be sensing how the selfless mindset sets a 'giver' up for disappointment. Imagine discovering that someone has taken advantage of your generosity, scamming you out of precious resources you might have used elsewhere. And then the scammer returns and asks for more from you. With a selfless mindset you'd be inclined to feel you were obliged to give; that you'd feel guilty if you didn't. With an *other-ish* mindset you'd be prepared to generously forgive the scammer for past wrongs if you could see there was a basis to do so. But you wouldn't be inclined to allow a repeat of the scam; you'd rather put your efforts where they could do more good.

Encouraging Generosity

What can leaders in education learn from Reciprocity Theory? Given the important place generosity has in our schools and centres it is something to think about carefully and discuss at length. It would be easy to mirror the simplistic, guilt-based approach taken in the news item. If we were to encourage teachers and students/children to have a selfless approach we would be doing everyone a disservice, and creating an environment in which generosity might appear for a time, then evaporate as the realities of life overwhelmed good intentions.

The more we can teach others how to make wise choices in how they express their generosity, the better we'll be able to create generous communities. Where there is a culture and practice of sustainable generosity, even those who are more inclined toward being matchers or takers will find that they adapt their behaviour to reflect community norms.

Capacity Building

By Dr Phil Ramsey

How do you go about making change to a school or centre? This is a challenge faced by leaders in education everywhere. We often hope that our passion for a new way of doing things will overcome whatever obstacles get in the way. Charismatic speeches imploring others to come on board may seem like an effective way of getting the change process moving.

Being able to express our passion for change is important. It would be wrong to think, though, that it is all that's needed. If it was, then transformation would be easy: make a few powerful speeches then move on to the next item on the change agenda. Leaders find that having motivated people is not the whole answer to the challenge they face; they need to think in terms of building capacity.

Systems expert Russell Ackoff voiced the axiom that "a system is perfectly designed to produce the results it is currently producing". If your school/centre is currently delivering results that are less than you desire that's because, according to Ackoff, the school/centre is currently designed to produce those results. Making a speech while leaving the basic design unchanged will have no lasting effect. In particular, the school/centre and the people within it have a given capacity for what they can accomplish. They may achieve this potential, or they may fall short of it if motivation is lacking. But they will only perform beyond it if their capacity and potential is grown.

What is capacity? It is a broad term used for the full range of things you need in order to work. Think about your own work. You may have been just as motivated 10 years ago as you are today, but your capacity has changed. Maybe you have less energy now than you had back then. But you also have learned new skills that enable you to achieve more with less effort. You may have built up a network of people you can call on for help. You may have more effective tools at your disposal than you had in the past.

If we give too much attention to motivation it can rebound on us because of the quirky nature of human psychology. Adam Grant reports, for instance, that people who are convinced that they are generous givers tend to give less than other people when asked. It seems they think, "Because I am a generous person, I don't have to express it by actually doing anything!" It is important to focus capacity building on the actions that are needed, rather than just the thinking of the people involved.

The authors of the book Influencer encourage leaders to build capacity for action in three key areas: personal, social and structural. People's personal capacity is having the competence to act and to sustain action on the basis of personal values. Capacity building involves training people and managing them in ways that enable them to make connections between the change and the values they really care about. Social capacity involves such things as the strength of the community supporting action, and the ease with which people can call on one another for help. Structural capacity involves the quality of the systems and tools available to help people take action.

Capacity building in any one area is not going to be sufficient to bring about change. As a leader, train yourself to think more broadly about the rich variety of capacities you can build. By doing that you'll be designing a system to truly deliver something new.

BOOK REVIEW:
Give and Take

By Phil Ramsey

'In the Moment' Newsletter – October 2016

Professor Adam Grant has written a brilliant book on the nature and implications of Reciprocity Theory. He explains the concepts clearly, and illustrates the dynamics of giving and taking with fascinating stories. I found I was readily able to recognise the types of situations and behaviour he was describing. And because of that the book gives practical direction on how we can deal with the realities of a complex world.

The book covers a range of issues related to generosity. It considers the different ways that givers and takers build networks and exercise influence. It discusses what is involved in establishing generosity as a community norm. And it helps the reader understand what is involved in making their generosity more sustainable.

For instance, our generosity will be more sustainable, according to Grant's research, if we can see that it is having some impact on the world. Many of us realise that we have a limited amount to give, and that our efforts represent a "drop in the bucket" of what is needed. We can still be determined to make sure that our "drop" goes into the right "bucket".

Selfless givers tend to sprinkle their efforts across many different causes, putting micro-drops in many buckets. They are often left wondering whether any of this sprinkling has done any good. Other-ish givers are more likely to adopt a "chunking" approach: big drops in a few buckets based on what is important to them. Then, they pay attention to whether the buckets they have chosen are having an impact; consequently they get regular reminders that their giving is making a difference.

The emotions associated with generosity can be challenging to manage. Generous people don't want to feel stingy. It is easy to feel guilty about not giving, even if you are pretty sure someone was trying to rip you off. It takes some boldness to set clear boundaries that allow you to be other-ish. We might prefer to live in a world where we don't have to be on guard against con artists, yet we need to deal with the reality of life as it is. *Give and Take* provides a strong framework for using practical, evidence-based wisdom when navigating around this complex topic.