

trans·for·ma·tion

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trans·for·ma·tion

Buzz Word

Transformation is a word that gets bandied about a lot now days. You might even call it a *buzz* word. Reactions to this word are probably as vast as there are people, because opinions of transformation are formed through the lens of personal experience and awareness of self at any given moment. Dr. Michael Carey's mention in *The Praktike of Leadership. The end of Development* James MacGregor Burns' use of Maslow's theories of human motivation and Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral development (Carey, n.d.a., pp. 1-2) to define the difference between transactional and transformational leadership. "Transforming leadership motivates followers toward end-values such as justice and equality, while transactional leadership is more concerned with modal-values (e.g., honesty, loyalty)," (p.2). This distinction can easily be applied to individual or personal transformation. Definitions can differ based on moral maturity or development and exposure to real transformational examples. The diversity of lenses contributes to the variety of labels commonly associated with transformation which include, "hippie or new-agey bull---t," change, transformation, renewal, self-esteem, self-awareness, etc. Some feel it's just about a great meme with a zen image that looks great on your social media feed. It's a topic of posers and wanna-bes, gurus, swamis, and senseis, marketers, publishers, and opportunists.

All of the hype and hate is enough to make one wonder if transformation is just a catch-all for that "thing" everyone seeks but never fully understands, the secret ingredient in the multi-billion-dollar industry of self-help. Why is it so important? Why should anyone take the time to dig into what transformation looks like to them and how it has been experienced in their own life? Talking about transformation, investigating what it really is, might mean actually getting

into one's *stuff*. It is much easier to just share the feel-good memes or unfriend those that do, so *stuff* stays firmly in its place, and no boats are rocked. That in itself says something about where one might be in their journey.

In this paper I will discuss common definitions of transformation, my own personal thoughts and experiences on the topic, and how transformation impacts leadership. I'll do this through reviewing leading literature on transformation and analysis of research and case studies on the subject. Hopefully, by the end, there can be a deeper appreciation for and relationship with the idea that transformation just might be the most exciting process in the human experience, and if embraced can contribute to each of us becoming the best version of ourselves while on the journey.

What is Transformation?

trans·for·ma·tion. Consulting Merriam-Webster.com and Dictionary.com results in just a handful of definitions for this word, most of which are math and science related. Outside of those definitions and the definitions using the word itself to define it, there are only two other delineations. One is that it is a wig or hairpiece for women. I have to admit, that was a new one for me. The other is a "change in form, appearance, nature, or character" (merriam-webster.com and dictionary.com, n.d.). This definition, if my opinion matters, feels like a gross understatement, specifically the change in nature or character. These changes commonly have life-changing results, so as we move deeper into what transformation may look like and why it is important to contemplate, we will expand beyond the etymology of the word into more of spiritual, emotional, and sociological meanings, beginning with my personal definition and experience.

Transformation and Me

Baby Transformation. Maybe it is the natural writer in me, but I have always carried a heightened awareness of self and an open ability for self-reflection. As a child, I was called a dreamer, a book worm. I was not a particularly athletic, scholarly, or popular child. I was--unremarkable. Being raised in a highly spiritual conservative Baptist home may have contributed to an early spiritual awareness and an inner existence that needed protection from the world. In this foundation is where I experienced my first transformation.

Parker Palmer speaks about the secret life of a child (2004). This is the instinct for protecting our self from scrutiny and ridicule at a young age and the initial process in dividing ourselves in two, public version and private version. “The soul animates the “secret lives” that many of us led as children, in an effort to shield our vulnerable selfhood from the threats of the world” (Palmer, p. 14). This protection is what I sought when I experienced a spiritual transformation at the age of six. I realized I needed help and salvation in order to survive this world. Even though young, I felt this experience deeply and it is the driving force that shaped my life and how I interacted with the world.

Maybe here is as good a place as any for me to share with you my personal definition of transformation formed by this early experience.

Transformation is the process of the soul reacting to forces that invigorate and drive self-awareness, engaging deep learning, growth, and new understanding of self and connection to life around you.

It might be argued there are different levels of transformation. There are periods in one’s life that explore new awareness but may not necessarily result in new levels of living your

foundational paradigm. There may be instances of transformation that actually contribute to a life of duality or as Palmer calls it, a divided life, resulting in “a wounded life, and the soul keeps calling us to heal the wound” (p. 20). Then there are transformations that help us heal the wounds of division in ourselves, altering how we function and who we identify as in the universe. I have a handful of transformations that have altered my awareness, but only two that have touched me so deeply as to shift me into a more connected identity and that healed the wounds of a divided life.

The first one I call my “baby transformation” as mentioned above. It was my earliest understanding of transformation and was a small version of healing an undivided life. I guess it would be considered a transformation that healed the wound between my human self and my creator. I then moved into a series of secondary transformations that shaped by life but may have also contributed to division in my identity. I realized at a young age I didn’t “do” the school experience like my peers seemed to. I had no interest in “cliques” and I wasn’t inspired to be an athlete, but I was motivated by working and planning my career. I made a plan for my life and a month out of high school met my husband. My “plan” was chucked out the window. This brought on other transformations associated with family life.

While my career went on autopilot, I transformed into a highly skilled chameleon, changing my colors to fulfill various expectations—career, volunteer, mother, wife. I “disappeared into the multiple roles and lost touch with my soul” (Palmer, 2004, p. 15). Even though I was living a fulfilling life, serving in my church and community, obtaining goals in my career, and maintaining meaningful connection with my family, I no longer dreamed of what “I” wanted to be when I grew up, and only saw wonder in the world when engaged in fantasy with my children. A season of discontent settled over me once my children were fairly self-sufficient

and I chose to focus on my career once again. I didn't have the clarity or drive I had when I was younger but still felt driven to achieve the same goals. However, I wasn't the same person, and had no idea who I was now. The division in my life was making itself known and this is how I existed until the second of my soul-deep transformations occurred.

THE Transformation. Around my forties, I experienced a catalytic career event that thrust me into what I would consider the biggest transformation of my life. The secret life I led as a child was finally released to me again through the nurturing of a close friend and co-worker who just so happened to be a licensed therapist. She is the closest thing I have ever had to a circle of trust. Her open questions allowed my soul to find a voice. I blossomed, challenged everything I had believed in in my childhood, even my first life-altering transformation, and everything I have believed since then. I found a renewal. It is an experience I carry with me daily, even though I struggle to maintain the purity of the enlightenment and singularity of that period. It healed the chasm between my true-self and my public-self. Sadly, the experience and the person that facilitated my journey into it, were tainted by a betrayal, thus creating a new fissure that I have yet to fully heal. This is where I recognize how this new division in my life hinders my ability to lead with genuine intent and ability to expose my true self as a leader.

Why is it Important to Leadership?

In his book called *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns (1978) explores the idea that there may be a catalyst that spurs intellectual and spiritual review that results in new thought leadership and ultimately change. This catalyst is conflict (p.142). If we extrapolate from this, a parallel with the inner conflict that Palmer discusses, we may quickly learn that discontent and conflict in our lives, professional and/or personal, may be calling us to deeper analysis of our

existence and identity in this world. This would therefore impact us across all facets of our life, as a parent, as a coach, as a spouse, as a leader.

The inner conflict, is sometimes the driver of external conflict, impacting our actual engagement with those around us. Palmer's mention of the necessity of a community to create a safe environment to dialogue with true self (Palmer, 2004), is similar to Burn's description of the eighteenth and nineteenth century thought leaders building circles of trust through coffee house discourse regarding the current state of the world and how they saw themselves in it. Through awareness of discontent and internal conflict, they utilized a communal approach to discovery (self and otherwise) which resulted in numerous spiritual, philosophical, political, and sociological changes in the development of our country.

It would appear that a dialogue must take place, whether it be private or in a trusted circle of like-minded people in order to truly lead in ways that will resonate and move our cause forward. There are many teachers, researchers, and writers that have helped us learn how to facilitate personal transformation. In the next section I delve into what some of the top-selling names have to say about it.

Inquiring Minds

There are thousands of books, peer-reviewed-journals, and articles written on self-awareness, self-improvement, and transformation each year. As I am passionate about this subject I have read many but wanted to focus on some of the more well-known publications that left their mark on me.

Brene Brown

Since four-time best-selling author Brene Brown hit the Oprah circuit, you'd have to be living under a rock to have not heard about her work regarding shame and vulnerability. She has

spent the better part of the past twenty years analyzing and learning about the experiences that give deeper meaning to our lives. In *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010) Brown explores the findings of her research into wholehearted living and what transformations need to take place to achieve it. While she touches on cultivating authenticity, a resilient spirit, meaning, calm, and freedom to play, she prefaces these conversations with a deeper dive into courage, compassion, love, and belonging, which she describes in full as wholehearted living. Her official definition is “engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, no matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough. It’s going to bed at night thinking, Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging,” (p. 1). This sounds ideal but getting to this place takes transformation at multiple levels and an awareness of self that takes time. As a matter of fact, Brown will be the first to say, there is no finish line for transformation. It is a road without a destination.

A key factor in transformation according to Brown, is vulnerability. Through her research she has concluded that “courage is one of the most important qualities that wholehearted people have in common,” (p. 12), and she has found that “ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line,” (p. 13). Not being able to do this inhibits transformation in ourselves and connection to those around us.

Brown cites Daniel Goleman’s *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, and his exploration of biological findings and neuroscience regarding connection. She quotes Golman, “Even our most routine encounters act as regulators in the brain, priming our emotions, some desirable, others not. The more strongly connected we are with someone emotionally, the greater the mutual force” (p. 20). He makes the scientific claim that we are

“hard-wired for connection.” In order to feel connected, we have to be courageous in exposing vulnerabilities and compassionate. Brown says practicing these things and living a “wholehearted journey” is not a “path of least resistance. It’s a path of consciousness and choice,” a path you choose to say to those around you, “I’m all in,” (p. 21).

Later in the book Brown quotes E. E. Cummings writing “To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody but yourself—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight—and never stop fighting,” in her confession that choosing authenticity is not the “easy choice” (p. 51). Through her research she found that the “*audacity* of authenticity” is what truly challenges the status quo, not just the “*act* of authenticity”. She has defined authenticity as “the daily practice of letting go of who we think we’re supposed to be and embracing who we are” (p. 50).

I trust this definition because I’ve tested this definition. As you learned in my transformation story earlier, I believe we experience transformative milestones on our journey, some define new labels we may wear, and others transcend the surface and alter our very identity. Maybe they actually *expose* our true identity more than they alter it. I found through releasing the identity(ies) everyone else expected of me I was able to embrace the imperfections as beautiful fractures from the journey lived thus far and wear them proudly as unique identifiers. Fear keeps us from exposing these imperfections, and I regularly battle the desire to stop fighting and just assimilate. Then I’ll read things like Brown’s reflection, “Authenticity demands wholehearted living and loving—even when it’s hard, even when we’re wrestling with the shame and fear of not being good enough, and especially when the joy is so intense that we’re afraid to let ourselves feel it,” (p. 50). Self-love, acceptance, and ownership of the journey traveled having made you the transcendent being you are becoming are all mandatory in the transformative life.

Parker Palmer.

Parker Palmer, mentioned earlier, was a new introduction in my ever-growing library of life and leadership resources. I first heard of him in my Organizational Leadership Master's Program introduction class. He has worked for more than forty years with teachers and others that have chosen fields of passion and influence. He is an author, teacher, speaker, and innovator of heart.

In Palmer's book *The Courage to Teach* (2017) he touches on a similar culture to that of Brown and Cummings when they spoke of the forces that want to shape us away from our true selves. He helps teachers and others look beyond the surface stubbornness, audacity, and disrespect by first looking inward. Oppression created by being marginalized and homogenized places blinders on us all. He speaks to his own experience in the classroom with difficult students and the labels he used to place on them when they disengaged. They definitely didn't choose to show their vulnerabilities.

Palmer tells the story of how one student helped him understand that silence and sullenness does not equate to being "brain-dead, but full of fear," (p. 45). He realized he needed to look fully on the fear in his students' hearts and understand it in order begin to engage their minds. He states, "It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honoring the other. It means not rushing to fill [their] silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear," (p. 47). He goes on to say that this could not happen until he was able to see the fear in himself. And he has said we can't see the fear in ourselves until we are able to hear our true selves speak.

In this fractured state Palmer draws the illustration mentioned earlier of the divided life and the tension this causes in the soul. In his book *A Hidden Wholeness*, he claims healing this

duality in our identity takes community, a trusted “circle of friends.” “The only guidance we can get on the inner journey comes through relationships in which others help us discern our leadings,” (p. 26). Again, the idea that discussion prompts healing, although he’ll be the first to confess there is a difference in the quality of community. Palmer experienced communities that could shred your soul, but he spent a decade or so working and learning in a Quaker community in Pennsylvania. This is where he learned that true community looked like. It is not for the faint of heart, but for those that find they hear their inner teacher more clearly through sharing and being challenged in a trusted circle of friends, than I’d suggest you read the book.

What intrigues me most about Palmer’s undivided life discussion is the individual quest for integrity that he states is rooted in two truths. One, “we all have an inner teacher whose guidance is more reliable than anything we can get from doctrine, ideology, collective belief system, institution, or leader.” Two, “we all need other people to invite, amplify, and help us discern the inner teacher’s voice,” (pp. 25-26). Palmer believes we need help with true transformation because “the journey toward inner truth is too taxing to be made solo, the path is too deeply hidden to be traveled without company, and the destination too daunting to be achieved alone,” (p. 26).

These statements seem a bit oxymoronic. We all have an inner teacher that is our truest guide through transformation and to self-identity, but that we really can’t converse with that guide alone. I struggle a bit with this as my “baby” transformation awakened in me an awareness that I am never truly alone, and that my practice in meditation and prayer have allowed me an easier dialogue with my inner teacher. The spiritual transformations (the majors) I mentioned earlier have awakened in me not only the awareness of the need to be true to my soul identity, but that there is a meta physics involved here that reaches beyond most of our understanding and

can only be experienced when released to exchange with the inner teacher. My inner teacher, soul, true-self ignites with the wonder of things not yet understood. This is where I find I am most at one with myself.

Margaret Wheatley.

It may seem strange to pull meta physics into this conversation right about now, but I would be remiss if I didn't mention the latest transformational moment I've had in my journey. It came upon my recent exposure to a concept and study that has been around for decades, quantum leadership. While on the surface it may seem out of place, the idea to apply modern findings in quantum physics that could alter the universe (literally) as we have been told it exists for the past 200 years. In her book, *Leadership and the New Science* (2006), Wheatley draws parallels between our Newtonian existence that has mechanized (disconnected) the universe and made humans irrelevant in it, to a more metaphysical connectedness of all things where we should "think of the universe that more closely resembles an ocean, filled with interpenetrating influences and invisible forces that connect" (p. 52).

Wheatley spoke directly to my inner teacher through terms I know nothing about that were sewn together with imagery of energies connected through scientific-esque reasoning. She looked at these emerging strategies through an organizational development lens that clearly allowed me to connect to how they would apply personally. Using fractals (infinitely unique mathematical properties) that have historically appeared random, as an example, Wheatley illustrates how long studied known entities in the universe have, through computer generated graphics, now been shown to have astonishing purpose when simple repetitive iterations that cover large periods of time are applied. To better explain this phenomenon, refer to the image and explanation used in *Leadership and the New Science* in Illustration 1 below. The precision

and beauty of the patterns these create illustrates there is something more intentional in the universe than had previously been posited.

Illustration 1



Three-winged Bird: A Chaotic Strange Attractor

This is a self-portrait drawn by a chaotic system. The system's behavior is plotted over millions of iterations. The system appears to be wandering chaotically, always displaying new and different behavior. But over time, a deeper order—a shape—is revealed. This order is inherent to the system. It was always there, but not revealed until its chaotic movements were plotted in multiple dimensions over time. (color section between pp. 124 & 125.

Wheatly (2006) closes her book with the same determination that Palmer does, and I cannot help but feel the wonder in her summation where his claims missed the mark. My inner explorer and true-self are piqued and in awe of how our souls may have similar connectivity as the universe appears to have.

If we take seriously the role of explorer and inventor, we will realize that we can't do this alone. It's scary work, trying to find a new world [or manage the existing one], hoping we won't die in the process. We live in a time of chaos, as rich in the potential for disaster as for new possibilities. How will we navigate these times? The answer is, together." "We cannot hide behind our boundaries or hold onto the belief that we can survive alone. We need each other to test out ideas, to share what we're learning, to help us see in new ways, to listen to our stories.

We need each other to forgive us when we fail, to trust us with their dreams, to offer their hope when we've lost our own (p. 192).

Internalizing the idea that we are all connected somehow (Wheatley), one could summarize that as an individual focused on practicing more selfless and self-loving behaviors (Brown), you could not only transform your own interactions with yourself and others, but could also contribute to the elevation of social, emotional, and spiritual intelligence of humanity as a whole.

Case Study

Employee-Owned

It just so happens the organization I have most recently been affiliated with is a prime case study subject on leadership, transformation, authenticity, and transparency, as discussed thus far. This organization was founded in 1995 and has been functioning on an employee-owned (Employee Stock Option Plan - ESOP) platform since 2005. Having begun as a healthcare business office staffing company, it has undergone dramatic transformation in its relatively short life span. Today it is a complete revenue cycle solution outsourcing partner having served over 600 clients in 35 states and boasts more than 400 employee-owners. The founder retired after she and the new-at-the-time CEO established the ESOP. He along with two other employees present at that time (now COO and CFO) complete the corporate executive suite.

From this brief summary you can imagine the amount of organizational transformation this leadership team has facilitated since 2005. Along with periods of great energy and morale, there have been periods of struggle, most commonly during rapid growth periods which inherently come with growing pains that impact employee morale, productivity, profitability, etc. These types of transformation are transactional, though, so remedying struggles associated has

been typically handled with transactional solutions. Improving training, encouraging employee morale to boost productivity, implementing new bonus programs to drive revenue and performance, etc. These approaches have been monetarily successful in that from 2006 to 2016 the organization increased profitability by 10% each year. I was not there during that period, so cannot speak directly to other types of transformation that took place during that time. I do know ESOP shares increased which allowed the employee-owners a little added incentive to keep moving in the same direction.

Since my introduction to the organization in January of 2017, there has been another period of rapid growth and reduced profitability, all while continuing to increase revenue with a record setting year in 2018. Of course, this provides no end of consternation on leadership's part, and influences their leadership approach with the organization as a whole. All this is said to set the groundwork for the leadership details we will now discuss.

Employee-input.

Executive Leadership. The comments and discussion I have been exposed to regarding executive leadership has varied, of course, dependent on who the conversation is with.

Front-line employees/Supervisors. For the most part front-line employees have no idea who the CEO is. He does not live in the same city and they don't recognize him if he is seen walking the halls. They see him once a year at the annual ESOP event where he wraps up the previous year, shares plans for the coming year, and lets them know how their shares performed, and how much money was deposited per share into their ESOP. They receive quarterly email letters from him (if they read them) with tidbits of information usually designed to set the expectations for yearend news. This reality is a bit of a double-edge sword. Whether

How you spend your time is the single clearest indicator of what's important to you."
(Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 75)

positive or negative, the CEO does not really have much direct impact on their day-to-day existence and not much influence in their personal or professional transformation and identity. There is however, a huge drawback to this that will be discussed later in this section.

The COO is a likable guy that walks the halls, knows people by name, and leaves a positive impression. He's a bit irreverent, and a regular Joe. He has a direct impact on their day-to-day opinion and engagement with them. This is typically a positive aspect, but he is also known for having a short fuse and has been witnessed openly yelling at employees by people that work the floor. It could be supervisor, directors, VPs, it just depends on where he is at the time and not caring who witnesses it. So, while a likable guy, the COO has lost respect of some of his most entry level team members through exhibiting a lack of professionalism. The direct impact he has on their day-to-day is mostly positive, but any strides in personal and professional transformation can be stunted by his outburst and unprofessional behavior.

The CFO is on-site and engages regularly with her direct reports but is otherwise a not visible. The building is large, and she is rarely seen straying further than the break room at the building center to engage with employees. If she does, it is said to be a parade-wave style of engagement which negatively supports the separation of power between levels of the organization. Thus, negatively impacting personal and professional transformation on levels only known to individuals that internalize it.

It is not uncommon for team member opinions of the organization's executive leadership to be derivative of their direct manager or VP's opinion of the them. Team members' limited exposure to the majority of the decision makers results in opinions that trickle down.

Executive Directors/Senior Directors/Directors. There are more executive level communications at the director level, but as they do not usually have a seat at the strategic table,

it can be based again, on their direct leadership's opinion (VP/Executive VP). I have had first-hand conversations with employees at this level, as I am a peer. Transformational impact of leadership on individuals at the director level sometimes depends on the function you provide them. There is favoritism and nepotism in the organization at this level, as well, and historically a mash-up of direct report organizational chart structure.

For example, I as the communication director reported directly to the President and COO, while other directors and sales representatives report directly to executive VPs. That was until recently. There was a corporate reorganization, resulting in communications and marketing being shuffled under the EVP of sales. I will not cover the logistical questions left hanging in the air as to corporate communications (internal and external) reporting to sales. This example is indicative of the powerlessness and personal frustration occasionally felt at the director level. No discussion, no discovery, no advanced warning, just mandates that mid-management level employees have no control over or voice in.

Another frequent acknowledgment at the director level, is that the leadership does not do what they say they are going to do, and as we know from Kouzes and Posner's latest version of *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), "There's a six-fold increase in levels of trust between the bottom and the top of the range in the frequency to which people report their leaders do what they say they will do" (p. 75).

Executive VP/VP/Executives. Obviously, I cannot speak directly to the leadership impact each executive leader may feel from their colleagues. However, I can speak to direct conversations I had at these levels that offer some insight. The over-arching vibe of the leadership impact at a peer level of this organization is *frustration*. The president, who on an operational level makes the majority of the day-to-day decisions, regularly gets shut-down and

vetoed by the CEO. A CEO who is preparing to retire and cash in his ownership shares in the near future. The CFO has also made it public that she is planning to retire in the next year, while the COO has admitted he only has about five years left. One of the VPs recently retired early because her personal health was being impacted by the amount of stress involved with the frustrations of having a voice, yet not having a voice on the leadership team. All of which leads to a workforce bracing for major change while left wondering about the true motivations of their executive leadership.

Another example is a recent annual management meeting. The CEO encouraged everyone to innovate and present ideas, creating momentum and engagement. However, at the end of the day he thanked them all for their discussion and proceeded to present his own previously-developed plan. In essence he disregarded and devalued the contributions each individual made to the conversation. This unaware behavior, as you can imagine, creates questions of self-worth, questions of his authenticity and true motives, and ultimately undermines all hopes of transformation in team participants and in the leaders themselves.

Findings. Understandably, the leadership team within this organization has been under immense stress, but that has been compounded by the fact that they tried to find solutions from inside a silo. This undoubtedly compounds the stress levels and fear of failure, as they have no idea what the heart of the organization feels or discerns about the solutions they may decree. That is, if they are actually aware of the silo from which they work. As Parker Palmer states when discussing the divided self in *A Hidden Wholeness*, “when we live behind a wall, people close to us become wary of the gap between our onstage performance and backstage reality” (Palmer, 2004, p. 44). This parallels the organizational dynamic discussed here.

Case in point. This week, while the president and CEO of the company were conspicuously absent from the day's events, ten mid-level support staff positions were unceremoniously eliminated. No corporate communication was distributed explaining why valuable corporate assets were losing their livelihoods, addressing the necessity of such a drastic measure, or providing guidance to team members abruptly left with no leadership entity. Most importantly, no communication took place acknowledging the diligence, devotion, commitment, and hard work of those that were "restructured." This has left in its wake fear for the future, crises of identity within the organization, and a palpable disrespect for the leadership of the organization in the mouths of those left standing. Transformation, personal and/or professional, may in response to certain influences, contradict the norms and expectations of expected transformational results. They may not be as positive as they could have otherwise been. Especially, when you remember the cultural contradiction between operational methods and the constantly messaged reinforcement of the organization being employee-owned.

Take-Aways. As mentioned earlier in this paper, vulnerability and authenticity are critical to transformation, whether individually or experienced in a leadership relationship. Yet, they are the scariest and hardest thing for an individual to do, especially publicly. However, without transformation evident in the lives of organizational leadership, and the willingness to be perceived as someone also going through transformation, what trickles "down through the ranks" is sometimes nothing to be emulated. Yet, that is unfortunately, exactly what happens. A lack of willingness to embrace one's true self in fear of recrimination limits connectivity, creativity, potential, growth, productivity, and most of all personal transformation.

Executive promises to no longer practice layoffs in times of low profits, promises to be creative and look at alternatives such a mandatory one-day furlough for every single member of the organization (including executives and sales), were never fulfilled. For all intents and purposes this sounds like a lot of lip service in the face of drastic actions witnessed by the employees this week, ripping through morale, productivity, loyalty, and customer service like a tornado through a forest.

“Leaders cannot be effective in the long run if they are simply power holders—rulers—and fail to see the moral and ethical implications of their work.

(Burns, 2003, p. 231)

Justifications will be made. Executive leadership will support their decision to restructure the organization as an attempt to rectify falling profits, which in all reality may have been the smartest choice. “Justification in this particular sense means that what the leader[s] did was permissible according to values that reflect the interests of the group or, more strongly, was required by these values” (Ciulla, 2004, p. 143). This speaks directly to the ends justifying the means. However, through the employee lens the process embraced to make this decision could appear morally reprehensible and self-serving; choices of leadership preparing to retire and cash in their shares at whatever cost. As Dr. Carey states in Part IV of *The Praktike of Leadership* (Carey, n.d.a) this ultimately comes down to the fundamental option, orientation toward self-transcendence or self-embeddedness, at the core of each of the leaders of this organization. “Only the fundamental option for self-transcendence leads to moral leadership (p. 2).

“A self-transcendent subjectivity serves as the foundation for the relationship of mutual elevation and stimulation of which Burns writes and is the prerequisite to a dialogic process of moral transformation,” (Carey, n.d.a, p. 2). “Leadership is ideological pseudo-leadership if the choice is made against self-transcendence, and therefore for self-embeddedness; such a choice ultimately protects the partial-values, that is to say the ideology, of the leader” (p. 4). How the

subject organization's leadership team could have established a different culture is what drives recommendations and future research discussed in the final section of this paper.

Recommendations and References

Summary. While there are a good many methods or practices that could heal this organization's issues, they would merely be a piece of chewing gum in a leaking boat unless the larger paradigm shift can take place. Admittedly, the stunted transformations are not solely laid at leaderships' feet, but also the fractured expectations of its constituents, thus creating factions within the organization shadowing something similar to the age-old Marxist proletariat and bourgeoisie issue. This example can quickly escalate into Paulo Freire's deep study of the relationship between oppressors and the oppressed. There is no easy answer, and this summary is a magnification of what could be a worst-case-scenario for the subject organization. However, factions form during discontent, shifting the powerless into defense mode, and lifting the powerful to new levels of untouchability.

Separations (factions) between the powers-that-be and the workforce can result if not addressed appropriately and honestly, and these factions can all but eliminate potential for transformation. Michael Keeley argues the troubles with transformational leadership within *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership* (Ciulla, 2004). He points out the disparities in organizational rhetoric such as "common goals," "general interest," and "public good", stating they are every bit as metaphysical as natural human right resulting in factional discord within the organization (pp. 166-167). This flies in the face of theories provided by James McGregor Burns and others who believe common goals, or communal interests are the focus of transformational leadership. He supports his findings with a reference to Madison's *Federalist* No. 10, "factional mischief does not follow directly from diversity of interests; rather, it occurs when some people try to

impose their interests on others. In other words, the problem of faction is not that individuals pursue separate interests, but that some are stronger, smarter, or richer than the rest and may use their power to take unfair advantage of other persons” (p. 168).

So how does this chasm between not only thought-leaders, but those that live this dichotomy daily, get bridged to pave the way for healthy engagement and transformation? This is but a small example of the abundant contradiction in schools of thought on leadership development, practice, definition, methodology, and so on.

Research and Opportunities. On August 2, 2018 a recent study completed by the University of Zurich in Switzerland and published in *Science* magazine was highlighted on National Public Radio (NPR) website. In quick summary, the study found that “Leaders make decisions for a group in the same way that they make decisions for themselves. They don't change their decision-making behavior, even when other people's welfare is at stake” (Greenfieldboyce, 2018). This claim is backed up by scientific evidence via group and individual situational engagement observations, questionnaire responses, and MRI scans.

The study is claiming there are neurological differences between leaders and non-leaders. Micah Edison a neuroscientist at the university stated in the NPR interview, “It's not always that easy to make such a choice and it's something that could be even a little bit aversive to you, to make a choice that impacts other people,” says Edelson. “And there are some people that seem to be able to do it; some people don't. So, we were interested in looking at that” (Greenfieldboyce, 2018, par. 5). He goes on to say, “preliminary work using MRI brain scanning supports the idea that leaders and followers differ in how their brains process information about gains, losses, and risk in the context of thinking about others.” (Greenfieldboyce, 2018, par. 13).

A cognitive neuroscientist at University College London, Tali Sharot, found these findings reasonable, however, cautions “that it's not clear whether this decision-making behavior is what led people to their leadership position, or if they've developed it as a result of real-world leadership experience” (Greenfieldboyce, pars. 15-16).

Sharot’s biggest takeaway from the paper was not the differentiation between the “leadership” and “non-leadership” neuroactivity, but that regardless of what *style* of leadership someone embodies, authoritarian, diplomatic, risk-taker, and risk-averse, they all have something in common in that their leadership decision-making behavior stays the same regardless of whether the outcome affects only themselves or other people” (Greenfieldboyce, pars. 19-20).

Recommendations. This piqued my curiosity and lends to future recommendations that might stem from additional research. If transformation begins inside the leadership person core, can we not address, in almost therapeutic fashion, the health and self-awareness of that core?

So, what happens if we take the idea of leadership and its collaborators (followers) back to the basic Ignatian principle that weaves through every major religion to facilitate real and intrinsic transformational metanoia? How would this be facilitated if we approached every interaction, decision, responsibility, and practice with a Golden Rule litmus test? *Treating others as we would treat ourselves. Expect of others nothing more than we would expect of ourselves.* Obviously, this is not always a good thing. We are all unique individuals, and let’s face it, we all know highly self-destructive people that have no interest in self-improvement.

What if at its core organizational leadership started with themselves, as is highlighted in Gonzaga University’s organizational leadership graduate studies program? Once individual leaders have clarified their foundational beliefs and self-identity, and allow that others to be in a different location on their own journey of transformation, then they can come together as a team,

and begin the process again on a group level, growing this process as they establish culture, policy, employee “handbooks,” trainings, and most importantly train up and mentor leaders throughout the organization. This will most likely take some kind of facilitation or outside observer to help with objectivity as the practice and paradigm expands. It may seem idealistic, but could it be possible for a representative team of collaborators from across an organization with this type of paradigm to act as a check’s and balances for the leadership team? A healthy and transparent dialogue could potentially lead to continued awareness of the collaboration between leadership and collaborators.

This approach could also disperse the decision-making stress on behalf of others as the leader(s) making those decisions are well-informed, knowing whether they have majority support of their constituents prior to making final decisions. This approach would undoubtedly support much more authentic and meaningful dialogue and facilitate relationships between collaborators and leaders throughout the organization. With this transparency, true empowerment, innovation, and personal/professional/organizational transformation might be supported. A new paradigm.

Conclusion

There has been a lot of ground covered here. I began with that buzz word transformation. I addressed current opinions surrounding it, the textbook definition, and my personal definition of it, followed by what modern thought leaders had to say about it, and a somewhat negative case study example of what happens in a circumstance that does not successfully embrace personal and/or professional transformation. The final portion detailed a summary of the case study and divulged recent research findings that piqued interest in some future research in my own studies and possible recommendations that might come from that. Thank you for reading along on this exercise in learning and diving a little deeper with me. I’ll leave you with one of my favorite

quotes from a book I have recently been exposed to that seems to simply encompass all that has been referenced here.

“Be brave enough to start a conversation worth having” (Stavros & Torres, 2018)

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