

Patterns: Which to Nurture, Which to Compost

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What are patterns that I can identify in my life?

- ***Are they opening me to my potential?***
- ***Are there more empowering patterns I can develop?***
- ***What am I not seeing?***
- ***What am I not paying attention to?***

A powerful, probing conversation at this meeting of The Power of Yin wove together the threads of experience and insight of women from Nepal, Burkina Faso, Zambia and the United States. While circumstance and issues women experience vary significantly in each of these countries, we discovered we also share deep commonalities.

Nods and smiles of recognition around the circle as women spoke of patterns as diverse as:

- doing too much for others
- taking on others' work because they are taking too long or not producing the desired quality
- reacting before understanding
- showing displeasure by being aggressive
- reflecting the fear and anger of the environment
- taking on other's problems as our own

As the conversation evolved, it became clear that in many cases we are not capitalizing on our own natural strengths. Women naturally lead through relationships, yet . . . "sometimes I get caught up in the task, or the outcome, or the schedule. When I did take the time (relationship lead) to ask my co-worker, 'Let's sit down and have a cup of tea.' we were able to establish an agreement that satisfied us both." "When I took time to discover what was going on in my colleague's life I could better understand his behavior, and I could respond more appropriately and more productively."

And in other cases we "forget" to use what we know. I know how to separate my own emotions and issues from those of others. I know the value of maintaining a personal practice that enables me to be true to myself and not at the mercy of the persons or the environment where I may be. When we need to interact in cultures that foster anger and fear we set short term goals for ourselves that keep us grounded - sending out a calm energy rather than absorbing the energy that surrounds us. We know how to do that.

And in still other cases, we may need to learn new skills.

- Becoming a skilled negotiator is a way of developing new patterns and new ways of problem solving.
- Nurturing flexibility allows us to meet our goals, without being locked into “one way” of achieving them.
- Continually enhancing our skills to “listen for meaning,” provides us more accurate information before we interact. Paraphrasing helps.
- Stepping back to look at the bigger picture, allows us to act on our values, rather than react out of the emotion of the moment. Valuing the development of others encourages me to not do for them what they can do for themselves. Valuing the relationship may stimulate creative responses for expressing displeasure without being aggressive.

Practicing mindfulness was also acknowledged as key to shifting patterns that were not serving us. Giving ourselves the time to consider or reflect keeps us from thoughtless reaction. “Let me think about that.” Asking questions of self: “Am I projecting my own perspective?” “What is the lens through which I am looking at this situation?” Being aware of what we are modeling brings valuable perspective to our actions.

Examining our assumptions was also identified as a key to developing new patterns of thought and action. Old images of leadership still “hang out” in our minds and sabotage us, we discovered. The image that a leader is an independent, isolated individual can block our effectiveness in shared leadership. A need to prove what I can do individually undermines collective efforts.

Stepping into our personal power means nurturing and reinforcing our habits of thought and action that lead us to fulfilling our potential. And, on the other hand, we’ll contribute the patterns that constrain us to the compost heap. See excerpt below on what brain research is teaching us about developing new patterns.

We are not the only ones who are increasingly appreciative of women’s leadership. Claudine told the story of a tribal chief in her country, Burkina Faso, who determined that a woman should become a chief, and that some lands should be designated to her. While the traditional royal lineage went from grandfather, to father, to son, Naba Saneem, determined that the community can’t be healthy without the leadership of women as well. You can read the story of this unprecedented action at <http://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article19214>

This led to our closing decision that our **focus for our next meeting, Thursday, April 16th**, would be stories of women’s leadership. Notice the women - in your family, at your workplace, in the world and in your community and bring your stories to our next meeting:

Thursday, April 16

Examples of Women’s Leadership

Brain Research: good news about habits

The good news about habits comes from study of the brain. Scientists have discovered that what happens in the brain when we repeat something over and over is that a new pathway, called a neural circuit, is formed, and it gets stronger every time we think or do the same thing.

Life is like a river flowing through a valley, the longer it flows in the same path the deeper and stronger that path becomes. That is how habits are made. So to create a new habit, we need to do or say the new actions or thoughts, repeatedly, over and over again. Research indicates that it takes the brain about three weeks to create strong new neural circuits.

Brain research indicates that focusing on something strengthens it - so if we spend time thinking about what we wish we wouldn't do, we are actually reinforcing that pattern of thought or behavior. Instead, if we wish to develop new patterns of thought, new habits, we need to put our energy into the new behavior, repeating these over and over again.

from "The Neuroscience of New Habits" by Sharon Eakes
The Systems Thinker, February 2008