COMPLIMENTARY

ADVANCING RELATIONSHIP-BASED CULTURES

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CHAPTER FIVE

Loving Leaders Advance Healing Cultures

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Chapter Five

Loving Leaders Advance Healing Cultures

Jayne Felgen and Pamela Schaid

How often do discussions of leadership include the word *love*? Whether it has been intentionally placed to the side or simply assumed that there is no place for love in leadership, we find that words like *loving* have not typically led the list of characteristics that describe an outstanding leader. Words like *strategic*, *visionary*, *analytical*, *fiscally responsible*, and *team-focused* might top the list, but somehow the seat of our humanity, the willingness to be guided by love, doesn't usually make the list. Still, when we reflect on those positional leaders we've known who stand out as exemplars, we do not have to look too deeply to see the love. It was there. You could feel it in their actions, interactions, values, and purpose. When we think of those leaders, words such as *purposeful*, *attentive*, *authentic*, *trustworthy*, *patient*, *vulnerable*, *kind*, *generous*, *humble*, *respectful*, *sincere*, *caring*, and *unselfish* come right to mind. Love led the way; most of us just haven't named it as such. In our work as nurses, executive leaders, and consultants in health care, we have been privileged to witness those who lead and manage in ways that help to advance the cultures of their organizations into what they want them to be—cultures that help people heal, not just recover. In this chapter we share lessons from their leadership.

What Is Loving Leadership?

Love as an element of leadership is not a new concept. Discussions of loving leadership can be traced back to the ancient Tao, which equates love with leading by serving. The servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as competently as possible (Greenleaf, 1991). Loving leadership is a key ingredient in recipes for leaders aspiring to advance a more positive healing culture within their organizations. Inspired leaders who love what they do and the people with whom they do it, inspire others to greatness. We have long held that successful organizations thrive when their leaders know and believe that there is a leader in every chair. We now also assert that the presence of love at all levels of the organization is a driving force in achieving quality, safety, and exemplary patient-centered experiences.

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Loving leadership is marked by deep affection and caring for those with whom we work and lead. It is a deep devotion with feelings of caring and respect. It involves nurturing, supporting growth and development, wanting the best for each person, and desiring to help people identify their gifts, talents, and strengths. Love in leadership means truly caring about each person, celebrating successes, as well as having empathy in times of struggle. It includes releasing judgment and forgiving past difficulties. It means being fully present in our interactions.

We have been told that "love and work do not go together" (hooks [sic], 2000). Love is understood as soft and intangible—something that cannot be measured—and yet it is the glue which holds relationships together and inspires commitment to a shared mission. Love in leadership is about changing the lens through which we view our workplace world. It is about empowerment of self and others, and it is about a willingness to be vulnerable, which allows us to connect at a deeper level.

What We Learned in Conversation with Eight Loving Leaders

As we prepared this chapter, we had the privilege of meeting with eight leaders, not all of whom work in health care, but all of whom lead with love. They allowed us to record our conversations so that their words could be included in this chapter. We were honored to meet with these remarkable leaders:

Peter Block is the author or coauthor of eight books on organizational development, community building, and civic engagement.

Glenn Costie is CEO of the Dayton VA Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio.

Mary Del Guidice is CNO of Pennsylvania Hospital and assistant dean for Clinical Practice and senior fellow of the Center for Health Policy and Outcomes Research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Matt Marchbanks is the director of business development at Sodexo.

Anne McNamara is former president of Galen College of Nursing and current principal at McNamara Solutions, a leadership-based health care consulting firm.

Tim Porter-O'Grady is a clinical professor and leadership scholar at The Ohio State University and the author of 21 books on shared governance, professional practice, and leadership.

Rosanne Raso is CNO at New York–Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center and the executive editor of *Nursing Management*.

Rear Admiral Michael Weahkee is CEO of the Phoenix Indian Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona, Indian Health Service, and Assistant Surgeon General in the U.S. Public Health Service.

As we examined the transcripts of our conversations, we looked for commonalities among how these eight people think about love in leadership and how they seek to express it in their work. We discovered this:

- Each leader had been mentored, formally or informally, by a loving leader, and each felt compelled to pay that mentoring forward. We call this a *thread of love* connecting generations of loving leaders.

- Most of the leaders mentioned that they prized authenticity, vulnerability, and humility in other leaders and aspired to demonstrate it in their own leadership.
- All demonstrated recognition of the interconnectedness of all people, using language such as, "We're all in this together."

The Thread of Love (or If You See Something, Say Something)

When we asked each of the loving leaders we spoke with about the leaders who made a difference in their early lives and careers, a theme emerged that was 100% consistent among them. Each loving leader spoke of someone having seen something in them that they hadn't seen in themselves. The best term for what they saw is *potential,* but it showed up more specifically as integrity, passion, excellent performance, and/or a high level of commitment to the work. While each leader could be described, in his or her early career, as "eager to succeed," their definitions of success were often humble, tending to be a version of, "I just wanted to do a good job." Mary Del Guidice, now a chief nursing officer, had a very clear vision of herself being a bedside nurse for her entire career, but when opportunities to make a broader difference were presented to her, she found enough of them irresistible that she ended up in a leadership position and eventually as an executive leader. Someone saw in her the ability to do more and have a broader effect. Her leadership ability was something she hadn't seen in herself, but when it was reflected back to her by someone she trusted and admired, she believed it.

Some version of this story was told to us by each of the eight leaders we spoke to, and it always had an additional component: All of these leaders described their own practices of seeing the best qualities of others and reflecting those qualities back to them. Interestingly, not everyone saw this as an act of love, but once we named it for them, there was consensus that even though they hadn't necessarily intended to express love, seeing the good in others and naming it is an inherently loving act. This "naming the good in others" draws people closer together and helps people feel safe, because it provides

Seeing the good in others and naming it is an inherently loving act.

evidence that they are not merely seen, but that they are *deeply* seen by someone they regard as a person of substance. As Peter Block said, "A love-based leader sees the gifts and capacities in people."

Perhaps because these leaders had someone see in them the right skill set and temperament for leadership, they are good at seeing it in others. Here's Glenn Costie talking about an early mentor:

> I didn't realize it at the time, but one of my mentors frequently picked me for difficult assignments in which an organization or department was failing, and it was my job to turn it around . . . This has happened through many parts of my career, and I realize now that they were all situations in which there was strife and conflict, and the people were feeling abused. They all needed love, and that was part of what we provided, even though we never said the word or even thought about it. You can't help feeling compassion when you see how people are suffering. You want to provide healing for the people and the organization, and that's a loving impulse.

Would any given leader have been able to heal the abuses Costie spoke of? What about someone with more experience or a more impressive track record than Costie had back then? Not necessarily. When an organization or department is failing, it's very hard on the staff. They get disheartened and start to doubt their abilities. They may fear, quite reasonably, that they will lose their jobs. Sometimes, along with the necessary improvements in systems and processes, they also need love. So why does it feel slightly dangerous to say so? Why does it feel perfectly safe to say, "We're going to need to make some changes around here, and you're probably not going to like some of them," but it feels more than a little risky to say, "When I look at this organization, this staff, my heart is full of love"?

We are inspired to call this legacy of seeing the good in others and naming it a *thread of love* because it makes its way, seemingly without exception, from one generation of loving leaders to the next. What was clear in our conversations is that these leaders all had the benefit of this loving practice and that they integrated it into their own way of being. As Mary Del Guidice told us, "I wanted to be like my CNO. I wanted to be

able to make anyone I came into contact with feel as special as she made me feel." But why was this pattern so consistent? We found ourselves wondering if the magic in this practice is that it actually transforms the receiver—that perhaps a person who feels unseen and not valued is fundamentally different from a person who feels seen and valued. Perhaps when someone you respect and admire sees something of value in you and says so, something is activated in you, and perhaps a characteristic of that *something* is that, since you cannot pay the favor back, you are compelled to pay it forward.

For loving leaders, there is no downside to developing the next generation. Admiral Michael Weahkee shared this:

> The risk of not developing the next generation is that you have underdeveloped resources, and you'll have to take on more yourself. When I develop others, eventually they will get to the point where they can develop the next generation. They'll have the knowledge, education, and modeling of how to continue. It won't just stop with me. I feel like I have a personal responsibility to pass it on … to take what was given to me and share it with others and support others. I have the capacity to teach more than one—as many as are willing.

This shows a generosity of spirit, but perhaps more impressively, it shows a generosity of time. When questioned about his capacity to mentor larger numbers of people, Weahkee continued:

> I do feel I have a very large capacity to mentor others. Even if the number of people I mentor now quadruples, it would be manageable. There's definitely the capacity to meet and spend an hour every month or so with however many people would like to come and do so. There are ways to reach larger audiences, but you can't overemphasize the value of the one-on-one relationship.

This expression of generosity of time and spirit came from a man who later shared, with great vulnerability, that his difficult beginnings made his experience with his own mentors mean more to him than he could express. Someone reached into his life and saw his leadership potential.

Again, Weahkee:

> I didn't have a lot of support growing up. If it's not there, and then suddenly you do have somebody helping you out, it's all the more powerful.

Loving leaders remember that patients and families are not the only people in their care. They see themselves also as trustees of their staff's wellbeing. One of the ways Mary Del Guidice has found to show her love for her staff is to believe in them. She shared an acknowledgment she received from one of her nurses on the day of our conversation. It said, "Thank you for believing in us and for not leaving us when you realized that we weren't what you thought we were." She's not only thanking Mary for loving the staff; she's acknowledging that Mary's love is unconditional. It's no surprise that she sees that love, expressed as belief in the abilities of others, spreading throughout the organization as well:

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> I constantly hear my team say, "I know this nurse is up to the task, I believe in her, she can do this." I think that kind of belief in people is a force that can move mountains. People can feel it when you believe in them, just like when my CNO believed in me. I remember thinking, "Wow, I feel like I've got wings!"

This thread of love also makes leaders throw their protégées into the deep end, sometimes before they realize they're ready. Here's Anne McNamara:

> One of my mentors, Dr. Lillian Goodman, came to me and said that there had been an unfortunate death on the board of directors and that she had put my name forward to sit on the board. There were some practical reasons that I was a fit, but I was in my 20s and was stunned by the idea. In meetings, the chair of the Board of Directors would turn to me and say, "So Anne, what are your thoughts on that?" It wasn't just about giving everybody a turn to talk either. I was the voice of the staff nurses, and the board needed to understand how

> the staff nurses would be impacted. I was the voice of thousands and thousands of staff nurses out there.

Perhaps loving leaders take chances on others because loving leaders took chances on them.

Authenticity and Vulnerability

What we have just described as seeing the best in others and naming it could, we realize, be done as a tactic, much like the now discredited leadership tactic of sandwiching negative feedback between two pieces of positive feedback. Even if people didn't detect the pattern, they could tell they were being managed as employees rather than connected with as people.

Poet David Whyte (2010) identifies vulnerability as a "core human competence." It is a strength, an ally. Brené Brown (2010) points out that vulnerability is an important foundation of love. Lashley and colleagues (1994) write about how vulnerability is inherent within our professional identity and is necessary for growth. Every day, health care workers come face to face with ethical dilemmas, complex problems requiring complex solutions, and the discomfort of not knowing all the answers. We are continually confronted with experiences of fear, pain, risk, and suffering. Lashley and colleagues (1994) wondered whether creating environments that honor this vulnerability by modeling it, accepting it, being gentle with it, and unconditionally supporting it would create "holding" environments that might "[nurture] a new language, a lived language of vulnerability" (p. 48), in which we acknowledge its continuous presence in our lives.

Clearly, unless the practice of seeing the best in people and naming it is authentic, it risks being seen as insincere and manipulative. The reason naming the good in others has been so effective for these leaders is that it's an authentic expression of what they see. Here's a story from Mary Del Guidice that illustrates the benefit of authenticity in leadership:

> When I was a kid, my dad was an executive at NBC television, and he would take us to his office once a year, at Christmastime. We would walk around 30 Rockefeller Plaza in Manhattan, and I remember being so struck that he knew everybody. He knew the cameraman's

> name, he knew the name of the guy who was sweeping the floor, he knew the newscaster's name. And with every person he would stop. "Oh, Bob, thanks for doing a great job" or "Rose! It's good to see you! How's your son?" And I just couldn't get over the fact that he knew everyone and they knew him, and they were thanking him and he was thanking them—I was so inspired by that. As a child at home, I'd imagined what being an executive would be like, and I pictured my dad in a big office moving papers around and talking on the phone and making decisions. But then I'd be with him at work and think, "This is just my dad being my dad." I knew the way he loved us at home, and he was that same loving guy at work.

This is a story of a man who went on to be president of Operations and Technical Services for the entire NBC network. We realize how unlikely it is that the people who hired him were specifically looking for a leader who exhibited authenticity, but fortunately for them, that's what they got. It also took no small measure of vulnerability for this leader to show up as his authentic self in such a high-powered position in such a high-pressure industry. He could have hidden behind the persona of a strong, decisive, powerful leader who ruled with an iron fist. Instead, he showed up as who he really was: a strong, decisive, powerful leader who cared deeply about everyone in the organization and did his best to provide an environment in which everyone could thrive. He was ahead of his time. As was perhaps *not* true several decades ago, vulnerability and authenticity are no longer seen as liabilities in leaders. Even people in very high-powered positions can succeed by truly being who they are, rather than projecting a false sense of hypercompetence. People tend to work hard for leaders who really see them and acknowledge their dedication and good work. It creates an environment in which people feel connected to a shared purpose, even if, as in the case of a television network, that purpose is to provide a profitable consumer product.

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In health care, we have the additional benefit of a larger mission to guide us, and that larger mission provides a standing invitation for leaders to lead with both vulnerability and authenticity. Because of the nature of our work, most of our "customers" are in a vulnerable state—they're compromised either temporarily or permanently. They're in non-ordinary states, needful of greater human connection. They need us to demonstrate that we're attuned to them—that we see them and that we're working together to weave a web of protection around them. This web of protection can do the job of reassuring patients and families, however, only if it is created by people exhibiting some degree of authenticity and vulnerability. The loving leaders we spoke with did not call out their own authenticity—not even as something they aspired to. Instead, they pointed to authenticity in those who had mentored them, and they effortlessly demonstrate it every day. Here again is Mary Del Guidice:

> I think it really is those who just stand up there, full hearted, put it all out there, that people connect with, they want to follow, they admire, they love back. I think you can get through the tough days with those kinds of leaders. It's the same with leaders as it is with clinical nurses. How many times did we as nurses check the schedule to see who we were working with? You knew you were going to have a good day if you were working with the nurse who really cared the most. It didn't matter if you had two sheets to share and all the meals were cold and half the team called in sick; if you were working with that one nurse, it was going to be a great day. I cared about being that kind of nurse, and I care about being that kind of leader.

We're All in This Together

The loving leaders we spoke with all expressed a sense of oneness with their staff. They spoke in ways that indicated that they were simultaneously accountable for the whole and inexorably "in it" with everyone in the organization. Here is Peter Block:

> The world treats leadership as an individual act, but it's a communal act. We say that an individual has to find his or her voice, but it's not so

much a voice to speak up against the system; it's finding the courage to speak together.

Loving leaders also have a sense that their responsibility for their team's wellbeing extends beyond the walls of the organization. They know that what happens on somebody's 12-hour shift is a pretty small fraction of that person's whole life. Here is Anne McNamara:

> If somebody gets a call from school and his kid is sick, I'm on it. I ask, "What's hanging out there—what do we need covered? We'll do what we need to do, but you go and do what you need to do as a parent." If someone has a mom or dad who's older and might be sick or actively dying, I'll sit someone down and say, "You need to go and be with your dad; you need to leave and just focus on family right now." I believe that's one of the ways I show love.

McNamara continues, referencing a quote by John Hope Bryant that we'd provided as inspiration for our discussion:

> Love releases energy, and employees deserve to have energy left over at the end of the day for their partners, their kids, and their communities. (Bryant, 2009)

It's important to note that this story was *not* followed by any sort of caveat such as, "It takes a lot out of the rest of us, but we do it." Instead it was spoken of as though helping someone in need (dare we say a loved one in need?) is an honor.

One of the most beautiful stories we heard about a leader who was a natural partner came from Rosanne Raso. When we asked her to recall mentors who had affected her throughout her career, she pointed to someone who reported to her rather than someone who was in a position to provide her with guidance or advancement:

> Jose Hernandez's approach was, "Okay, team, let's get together as a group. We can do this together. We can help each other. What do we need from each other?" And later, when whatever initiative they were working on would be rolled out, it was with the same spirit. We'd collaborated, had the same clear goals, we'd shared a purpose, and

people felt good about what we created. He's an example of what happens when love meets practicality.

What Rosanne Raso learned from Jose Hernandez was that it is just plain true that we really are all in this together. The togetherness wasn't something he made happen. In fact, we believe it's never something someone makes happen. Instead, it's a truth that is revealed by loving, insightful leaders who are tuned in to the interconnectedness of all of the people they cross paths with. Here's a story from Tim Porter-O'Grady that amplifies that reality:

I had done a lot of work in the 1980s starting the concept of shared governance, and in the '90s I was doing a presentation at an organization, and a person came up to me whom I'd never met before. She just wanted to tell me that she'd heard me speak ten years ago and that I'd had an unbelievable impact on her life. It was a compliment, but it sent me into a mental tailspin. I thought, "What if the real purpose of my life had been conveying whatever I'd conveyed to her in that earlier presentation?" In the hours and days that followed, I thought a lot about it, and then I sort of turned it over and looked at the dark side. What if there were also moments when I had done or said something that facilitated the "dark force," if you will. So it became very important to me to have integrity in how I formed my life, my work, my relationships.

Porter-O'Grady understands that we are all interconnected, whether we pay that reality any mind or not, and it created in him a heightened sense of responsibility. Because he was up in front of people and seen as an authority, he knew that his words carried weight and that he owed it to the world to be careful with them. It's clear also that he sees himself as a "brother on the path" rather than as a person with all the answers:

The only thing you can do is to enable each other and engage each other along the way in the journey we're all on, in whatever way helps us move together on the trajectory. If I have a leadership role, I have an obligation to create a safe space for us to move forward together and to encourage it. I can enable your increasing ownership

and opportunity in that journey, and that's what I'm going to do as long as I'm wearing the leadership hat.

Humility

When we asked our loving leaders about the personal qualities of their own mentors, they often pointed to humility as a defining characteristic that they both admired and aspired to. This is Matt Marchbanks:

> When I think about great leaders, great parents, great teachers, I think about technical expertise—they're all good at what they do—but for me, the differentiator is humility.

Humility is an expansion of the spirit of "we are all in this together." Humility begins with the belief by these loving leaders that they are serving the greater good, something bigger than themselves—that their work extends beyond their own accomplishments. Humble leaders value all of the contributions of each individual as a significant force in serving the greater good. Humble leaders are more focused on achieving the goals of the organization than on individual credit, and they can admit they don't have all the answers. As Peter Block said:

Humble leaders are more focused on achieving the goals of the organization than on individual credit.

> The best leaders I've known were the ones who sometimes said, "I don't know." They refused to take on the parental mantle. Loving leadership honors uncertainty.

Loving leaders also have the humility to learn from their mistakes. Humility allows a loving leader to be vulnerable and to take risks. Could it also be that humility plays a major part in a leader's resilience? This is Anne McNamara:

> It's important to have confidence in moving things forward even if there are failures along the way … just step back and look at it and learn from it.

She continues:

> Everybody brings their gifts and talents. I know what I'm good at, but I know there are others who are good at things I'm not good at, and those are the people I try to surround myself with. When I think about the people I've admired, they were all pillars of excellence in their particular area, and they also knew the boundaries of what they knew and what they didn't know.

Matt Marchbanks recognized humility in his mentors and sought to repeat it in his own leadership:

> The people who mentored me were so clear in who they were that they were comfortable being vulnerable with me; that allowed me to become a humble leader, to lead with humility even when I'm very clear and confident in what I'm doing.

Humility is about being with, working with, and partnering with others. Not one of us can go it alone. Humble leaders understand and recognize our shared humanity.

Goodness

The final characteristic of these loving leaders is one that we didn't mention earlier in this chapter because it is very hard to describe: All of the leaders we spoke with exhibited something we're reluctantly calling *goodness*. Our reluctance to name this is due to the fact that it's impossible to see into people's hearts, to know their true aims. Still, we cannot ignore that as we spoke with these leaders, there was a sense that it was important to each of them to be a good example, a good team member, a good person. They understood that the eyes of a great number of people were upon them, and they knew that, because of their elevated roles, they had a responsibility to demonstrate the highest level of integrity.

This brings us back to the fact that inherent in the work of health care is a sense of higher purpose. Because of the nature of the work we do, the organizations we create are like few other organizations, and our leaders must also be a cut above. Leaders in health care must excel not just in their ability to keep an organization profitable but in their ability to keep

an organization pointed toward the less measurable aim of providing a space in which patients, families, and team members can consistently feel seen, valued, held, and cared for—a space in which they can feel loved. None of that can be faked. People feel seen only when we see them. They feel valued, held, and cared for only when we value, hold, and care for them. And they feel loved only when we love them.

Our findings do not support the idea that loving leaders can be mentored into being unless the seed of goodness is already there, begging to be watered. We do believe, however, that this seed of goodness is more common than not. It appears from our conversations that if there is a formula for loving leaders, it is this: When a healthy measure of self-questioning sits on a foundation of absolute clarity about the goodness of the mission, people respond positively. Here is Glenn Costie:

> I think to myself, "We're going to start moving down this path, and if we have to change midcourse, that's fine. I am not married to the one course of action." It's a matter of clarity; you can change course as needed because you're clear about the fact that you're moving toward the right goal.

We think we understand something about what it means to know what the "right" goal is. We think you know what's right when you're tapped into your own goodness.

One of the risks of exhibiting goodness is that you'll hear what Mary Del Guidice heard from a colleague, pretty early in her tenure, after she'd declared that what her staff needed most was love. This colleague said, "You know, Mary, those rainbows and lollipops may not work here." She walked out of the office thinking, "Well, I was hired with these rainbows and lollipops, so I'm going to keep going. I'll just have to figure out how to spread them in a different way."

We imagine that it is equally true that Mary would not have succeeded in just any organization and that not just any organization could have attracted Mary to work there. When a leader exhibits goodness during the interview process, you can bet she is looking for an organization in which it can flourish—where her seed of goodness will be watered and where she sees other seeds she can water.

From what we can tell, this sense of goodness is a source of power. This is Michael Weahkee:

> When I consider being a loving leader, it makes me feel like I have a purpose, and I have a reason. I feel that in my spine. That's what drives the perseverance and commitment in me: knowing that I can have an impact.

Our time with these loving leaders taught us that goodness is easy to spot if you're looking for it, which brings our summary of what we discovered in our conversations right back to where we started. "Seeing the best in others and naming it" has a lot in common with spotting the seeds of goodness in others and watering them. It's what loving leaders do, and that is a very fortunate thing.

The Four Practices of Loving Leaders: Attuning, Wondering, Following, and Holding

The four relational practices of attuning, wondering, following, and holding are actualized by most of us, quite naturally, in our best moments. The practices were originally identified through the observations Koloroutis and Trout (2012) made as they watched and deconstructed what behaviors people were most consistently exhibiting in successful interpersonal encounters (p. 3). When things went well and people appeared to feel seen and satisfied, attunement was always a factor, and wondering, following, and holding (either singularly or in myriad combinations) were evident as well. The loving leaders we spoke with demonstrated all four practices quite consistently, whether they were familiar with the names of the four practices or not.

We're going to share what attuning, wondering, following, and holding look like when leaders practice them, but first we want to say something about why effective leaders might choose to consciously engage in these practices. The practices do provide some "soft" advantages: It stands to reason that people will like you more if you attune, wonder, follow, and hold. The practices also make people more authentic, and authenticity, as we've said, has some profound advantages, not the least of which is that it fosters trust. However, we believe that the most

compelling reason to consciously practice attuning, wondering, following, and holding is because they optimize every interaction and therefore every relationship. This is why the application of the four relational practices was chosen as one of the primary threads that runs through this book. The four practices are the how-to for healthy relationships. It is simply impossible to attune, wonder, follow, and hold without improving every relationship in which you practice these skills.

Attuning

It is simply impossible to attune, wonder, follow, and hold without improving every relationship in which you practice these skills.

Attuning is an intentional connection with others. It makes us curious about people, allows us to fully perceive the impact of our presence, and causes us to align ourselves with others. "Attunement means we see a person as a person rather than as an obstacle or an object or a labeled category" (Koloroutis & Trout, 2012, p. 67). These authors also tell us that compassion and empathy are deepened as a result of attuning to people. Leading with love means that we consistently attune to those with whom we interact. Our conscious attunement to others nurtures them (and the relationship itself), and it shows respect.

Focusing your attention on those you lead, one at a time or in groups, is an example of attuning. Attuning is simply "tuning in" to the person standing in front of you or the conversation happening around you. It is a way of being intentionally present that demonstrates respect for and value of the people you lead. Loving leaders—even those who have no awareness of the four relational practices—find themselves attuning to others because they have a genuine interest in the people with whom they share the honor and privilege of working. As we learned in our conversations, loving leaders attune enough to see skills, abilities, and potentials that those they're leading perhaps didn't see. While attunement can be a one-way action (i.e., you can attune to someone who cannot or will not attune to you), it leads most often to a mutual connection. Attuning to someone is an act of valuing, respecting, and acknowledging the importance of the person. Unless the person you're attuning to has strong barriers to receiving your attunement, he or she is likely to feel valued, respected, and seen in your presence.

Loving leaders attune to individuals, to teams, and to the systems they lead. When we attune within our teams we find our strengths, synergies, and shared vision. When we attune to systems we feel the power of the organization, which can be a great source of inspiration. Glenn Costie described his leadership team's attunement like this:

> Right now I have the most connected leadership team of any place I've ever worked, at any level in any role, and it has to be because of the culture we have here—it's because of Relationship-Based Care. That began on day one, and since then everything that we've been doing everywhere in the organization has been focused on building healthy relationships. The overall framework of our relationship and our love—I'll use that word now because I think we do all love each other—is that we really are a team. We're tuned in to each other, and we look out for one another.

Attunement, as you discovered in Chapter Three, is the doorway to human connection. It stands to reason, then, that it is among the most important leadership tools in existence.

Wondering

If you want trust to permeate your culture, cultivate the practice of wondering.

Wondering is defined as curiosity or genuine interest in another. In a therapeutic relationship, this is the practice that helps clinicians to relax their preconceived notions and to open all of their senses so they can discover what's going on with patients and families and/or stay in the mode of discovery until a way to care for (if not cure) the patient can be found. While that aspect of the practice of wondering applies beautifully to a leader's role as problem solver and strategist, there is another aspect to wondering that a leader can benefit from, perhaps a dozen times every day: The conscious decision to wonder keeps us from judging too quickly. Wondering helps leaders to assume the good intent of the people

Wondering helps leaders to assume the good intent of the people around them, particularly in times of upheaval or confusion.

around them, particularly in times of upheaval or confusion. This is an invaluable practice for every loving leader to embrace, and it is a phenomenal advantage to a culture when a leader can visibly spend time wondering with teams or the entire organization. The loving leaders we spoke with talked about how much they respected leaders who had the courage to admit they don't know everything. Peter Block clearly admires this quality:

> Not knowing is a relational asset. The best leaders I know were the ones who said, "I don't know. I don't need to know; together we'll figure it out."

He's talking about the relational asset of staying in a state of wonder longer—of not concluding so quickly. He expanded on this idea a few moments later:

> To me, love has to be associated with the willingness to support others' freedom, support others' purpose. One of the greatest acts of love I know is to believe that for every great idea, the opposite idea is also true.

The practice of wondering demonstrates that a leader is secure in not knowing, and the practice of inviting others to wonder with you is a visible demonstration of your eagerness to partner with the talented people in your organization.

Following

Following is about listening closely, following cues, and exploring. As Stephen Covey asserted in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2013), seeking to understand before seeking to be understood is an essential practice for effective leaders. Attuning, wondering, and following are the means to understanding others.

The unfolding of someone else's story happens when we follow. As a leader, this practice optimizes your ability to stay informed while also providing others with the experience of

Following is either sincere and heartfelt, born of genuine interest, or it is not following.

being deeply listened to. This can be a transformational moment for people. When you lovingly listen to others, you give them the gift of your attention. It is vital, however, that this practice never be used as a technique. Following is either sincere and heartfelt, born of genuine interest, or it is not following.

Holding

Holding is a practice that creates safety and builds trust. Many of our loving leaders spoke of being the beneficiaries of leaders who provided support for them to take risks or to reach beyond their comfort zones. They spoke of learning from their failures and providing opportunities for their protégées to learn from their own failures without fear that they'd be "dropped" by their mentors if things went wrong. They spoke of feeling confident, and they spoke of wanting to provide a culture in which the people in their organizations who were focused on doing what was right for patients and families would feel confident as well. These are all intentions and actions that create holding.

Holding builds trust. It's what allowed many of the loving leaders we spoke with to feel secure in following their ambitions.

Michael Weahkee spoke about his mentor creating challenging opportunities for him to grow and develop his skills but always within a web of emotional and professional safety. In his words:

> He opened doors for me, but it was up to me to walk through them. I felt safe and confident. I trusted him and his belief in me. Even if I tried and failed, I knew it would be OK. I would be able to learn and do better the next time. There would be no shame.

Holding creates the kind of professional safety he's talking about and gives leaders and potential leaders the confidence to stretch and grow. It removes the fear that a person's failures could get him exiled, which makes space for continuous learning, improvement, and creativity. Holding builds trust. It's what allowed many of the loving leaders we spoke with to feel secure in following their ambitions.

Co-authoring a New Cultural Narrative

As we researched leadership for this chapter, we happened upon this quote: "While it is clear millennials don't really need a lot of trophies, they nevertheless do need a lot of love" (Crowley, 2016). Before any of your current ideas about millennials come rushing to mind, we hope you'll consider that the need for love doesn't make millennials unique. What makes them unique is that they're able to articulate their need for it. Generations X, Y, and Z need love, too. The two baby boomers writing this chapter need love, and so does everyone else.

The workplace is always changing. As we continue to make our way into an age that is alternately called the digital age, the information age, the post-information age, the computer age, the new media age, and (our favorite) the age of relationships, the one thing that's certain is that work and people will continue to change and at a rate that will continue to be nothing short of dizzying. One of the tasks that falls to this and every generation of leaders is to help design the cultural narrative. What stories will we tell about who we are and what matters to us as we move into this new age?

The experience of speaking with these loving leaders provided us with a window into their cultural narratives. They spoke openly about connection, caring, and commitment. Their passion for leading was evident in their expressions and body language. Their openness, authenticity, vulnerability, humility, and commitment to a greater good were easy to see and clearly articulated. They are living a story of connection and caring, nurturing and loving their teams right along with those they serve, and they and others are telling that story as they live it. "Love is a practice," says bell hooks [sic] (2000, p. 165).

We found ourselves greatly humbled by the experience of talking with these eight leaders, and from our brief time with them, we ourselves are inspired to love more, to take more risks, to provide others with the opportunities to take risks, to be more vulnerable, and to fearlessly use the word *love* as we make our way through the world. Imagine working in a culture in which it's normal for people to express love for one another. Imagine receiving care in such a place.

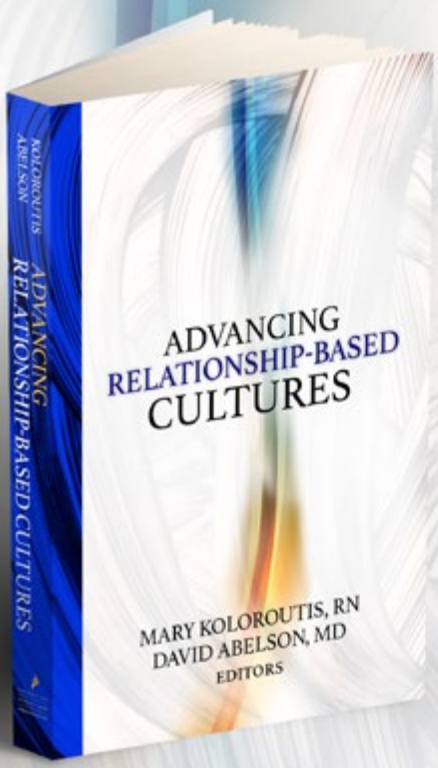
Summary of Key Thoughts

- The presence of love, at all levels of the organization, is a driving force in achieving quality, safety, and exemplary patient-centered experiences.
- It is an act of loving leadership to see something of value in those you serve and to let the person know you see it. Every leader we spoke with talked about someone having seen something in them that they hadn't seen in themselves.
- There is no downside to developing the next generation. If their accomplishments eventually surpass your own, that is cause for celebration.
- Vulnerability and authenticity are no longer seen as liabilities in leaders. Even people in high-powered positions can succeed by truly being who they are rather than projecting a false sense of hypercompetence.
- Loving leaders have a sense that their responsibility for their team's wellbeing extends beyond the walls of the organization. They know that what happens on somebody's 12-hour shift is a small fraction of that person's whole life.
- Loving leaders have the humility to learn from their mistakes, be vulnerable, and take risks. Because humble leaders are more amenable to learning from their mistakes than being crushed by them, humility helps leaders to be more resilient and to model the importance of continuous learning and improvement.
- Loving leaders care about being good examples, good team members, and good people.
- Loving leaders (even those who have no awareness of the four relational practices) find themselves attuning to others simply because they have a genuine interest in the people with whom they share the honor and privilege of working.

- Wondering helps leaders to assume the good intent of the people around them. Further, the culture is markedly improved when leaders visibly spend time wondering with teams or the entire organization.
- The practice of following optimizes the leader's ability to stay informed while also providing others with the experience of being deeply listened to.
- Holding creates professional safety and gives leaders and potential leaders the confidence to stretch and grow. It removes the fear that a person's failures could get him exiled, which makes space for continuous learning, improvement, and creativity.

Reflection

- Consciously practicing attuning, wondering, following, and holding is the key to optimizing every interaction and therefore every relationship. Given this reality, does that make the use of the four relational practices an ethical obligation for leaders? Why or why not?
- Does the cultural narrative of your organization include the word *love?* If not, in what small way could you introduce the idea that love ultimately defines the work of everyone who works in health care?
- Who models humility and loving leadership in your culture? What specific actions stand out for you?
- As Peter Block said: "The best leaders I've known were the ones who sometimes said, 'I don't know.' Loving leadership honors uncertainty." Reflect on whether your culture values expressions of uncertainty. Is it okay to say, "I don't know?" Why or why not?



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