

► *The Wisdom Web: The Interchangeable Dance of Leader and Follower* by Maureen K. McCarthy of the Center for Collaborative Awareness

Look at what it means to be a leader today. And I mean leadership in the sense that every one of us is called to be both leader and follower at various times in our day. When you look at leadership over centuries, the 2000 years before Christ was characterized by physical domination. "If I conquer you, you follow me." The last 2000 years through to today has been largely characterized by leadership through intellectual domination. "I have the information and I'll let you know when it's time for you to know." It's the foundation upon which our corporations, religious institutions, and governments have all been based. The hierarchical business models we have grown up with all stem from this thought process.

But we're moving into a new model of leadership that is calling for new foundations to support it. It's one based on what we call a Wisdom Web. We're currently living in an age of information overload. If I want to continue to be a hierarchical leader, I'm fooling myself to believe I can contain and control all the information and decision-making that is required to run a business, community or family today. I need to know when to lead and when to step back and encourage others to lead.

The Shift

As an example, imagine a time when we were eleven years old. Our teacher asks us to write a paper on Martin Luther King, and we have three weeks to complete it. The first two and a half weeks we spent time at the library, with our friends, looking through the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the card file, and the encyclopedias. The last few days we actually wrote the paper. When we came back to class, chances are the teacher still had more information on Martin Luther King than we did. And the old style hierarchical model says that the teacher, at the physical head of the class, is the most knowledgeable in the room. She'll tell us when it's time for us to know.

Now switch your mind to a classroom of today's 11-year-olds with the same assignment. That first afternoon they head home, log onto the internet, and in two seconds they have over 80 million entries on Martin Luther King. Now they have to spend the next three weeks sifting through an enormous amount of information, rather than gathering it. Sifting is a very different skill, and one we weren't taught in our formative years when information was generally gathered and parsed out by agreed upon experts. When these kids come back to class, chances are at least one of them, if not more, will have a piece of information on King that the teacher does not have. In fact, someone might have come across the email address of the great grandson of King, emailed him, and found out something no one else has ever known.

If the teacher sees the world through the old style model of hierarchy, she may not welcome the student's information. When you operate under the principle that knowledge is power, anything that threatens that power is frightening. The teacher does not have bad intentions, it's that the societal model said she was to be in control to be considered a successful teacher, and control was maintained through gate-keeping knowledge. Today's teacher, manager or leader, operating on the old principle, will disengage a person faster than you can imagine. We need to begin to let all knowledge into the room, any room. And that means stepping back and letting others take the lead, or stepping up to lead if we normally follow. Knowing and operating comfortably in both is crucial.

The Interchangeable Dance

We call this transition the Interchangeable Dance of Leader and Follower. If a man asks me to dance, current rules say that he leads and I follow. So even though we've never met, we can basically figure it out. Now

imagine that those rules were thrown out. This gentleman and I get up to dance, but what happens next? Well, I need to stop a second and ask myself the question, "What dances do I know? When should I be leading? When should I be following?" He needs to ask himself the same questions. Then we need to exchange that information, and ask clarifying questions. Now we better know ourselves and the other so that when the music starts we know where we're going. The music represents the culture of the organization or the society. Put on any type of music, and as long as I know me and you know you, and then we exchange that information, we'll be able to effortlessly dance together. And it doesn't matter what company we work for, who we're in relationship with, what culture we're in, or language we speak, when we better know ourselves and others we are more compassionate and resilient, and our relationships are engaging and creative.



From Controlling Information to Custom Designing

We have a great deal more knowledge at our fingertips today, and we can't afford the attempt to gain power by controlling it. That's no longer a possibility. Leaders who have yet to see that are eventually going to fall like the Berlin Wall.

The only way for me to do the Interchangeable Dance of Leader and Follower is to better know myself and where my strengths and passions lie, and then ask the pertinent questions to better know and understand others. My knowledge is no longer contained in my head, but in the web of people I connect with, as well. That's true power.

In order to capture and build on the knowledge of ourselves and others, it's important to create a Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document (www.blueprintofwe.com). The Blueprint of WE is a collaboration process used to establish healthier, more resilient business and personal relationships in a world that changes in increasingly complex ways, making the old ground rules no longer reliable. It quiets the Safety Brain and turns up the volume on empathy and co-creativity. It gives you the power to be the architect of your life, rather than squeezing into pre-established relationship definitions. Whether there are 2 or 20,000+ people involved, every person writes their portion of the Collaboration Document. It is then merged, and everyone gets together for an amazing Clarifying Conversation that enables each person to see and be seen, igniting the mirror neurons in our brains which tap into our natural ability to attune to one another. It captures what draws each individual to the situation, your personal preferences and expectations; and it provides a path back to peace if the need arises. It is often being used to replace or enhance traditional legal contracts.

It is the speed of trust that enables us to better navigate the challenges that rise up before us, meeting them with the ease. When we do the Interchangeable Dance of Leader and Follower and custom design our work together we can do this dance without stepping on each other's toes.

Maureen K. McCarthy is Director of the Center for Collaborative Awareness and is the co-creator of the Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document with her business partner and husband, Zelle Nelson. As Maureen worked within corporations and communities large and small, she realized that rather than fixing what was broken, she was drawn to pioneering new foundations that would build healthier individuals and groups from the start. The Blueprint of WE Collaboration Document is one of those foundational tools, which is now being used in 100+ countries around the world in both business and personal settings. Visit www.blueprintofwe.com to download the concept paper and sample Documents to create your own Blueprint of WE Collaboration Documents. Maureen and Zelle teach and speak on the Blueprint of WE in many parts of the world, as well as offering a Facilitator Certification Program and online classes. You can reach Maureen at maureen@blueprintofwe.com. She lives in Asheville, NC, USA.