



Creativity to Flourish: Pathways Toward Appreciative Leadership

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Abstract

Most of the challenges in organizations don't need problem-solving but benefit from building and maintaining relationships. Therefore, a relational, conversational, social constructive approach to leadership is needed. Such a concept of

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leadership focuses on mobilizing our creative potential and returning to our creative source. This chapter proposes pathways into the power of our presence that will help us develop our full potential as appreciative leaders, coaches, or thinking partners.

Keywords

Creative source · Leadership · Heartfulness · Presence · Flourishing · Creativity

Introduction: A New Look at the Concept of Leadership

Everything the appreciative leader does conveys to others a genuine, respect-filled, positive intention to produce enduring change for world benefit. Reality for the appreciative leader is not a given: It is there for our active shaping in the direction of higher purposes. David Cooperrider, prologue to *Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder* (Schiller et al. 2001: 17).

From the start of the new century and with the technological changes in our world, we have been discovering more about what leadership means and what it requires in a particular situation. In reality we only touch on the surface of what leadership and the concept of leadership mean in our changing era. As our environment continues to change, we also need to look again at how the concept of leadership is evolving. And it might well be that, in accordance with what people like Otto Scharmer (theory U) and David Cooperrider (appreciative inquiry) say, we not only should look at what we can learn from the past, but we should also reflect on our journey when we take a look back from an imaginary position in the future (Scharmer 2007; Cooperrider et al. 2008). Adopting this perspective of “looking back from the future” adds a new dimension to the concept of leading and being appreciative leaders.

A leader that is appreciative is inclusive, humble, serving, open to feedback, and able to adapt to changes rapidly as she/he is not “stuck” in her/his position. An appreciative leader anticipates the future and uses positive images and language of abundance that make people and resources flourish. Whitney et al. (2010, 3) use the following definition: “Appreciative leadership is the relational capacity to mobilise creative potential and turn it into positive power – to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm and performance – to make a positive difference in the world.”

What is needed to be or become such an appreciative leader, coach, or thinking partner? This chapter addresses these four needs:

First, a genuine understanding of how generative conversation and appreciative inquiry create new, multiple perspectives, which turns leadership into a realm of social constructionism.

Second, the insight that appreciative leadership is both the way and the objective and is ideally to be mirrored in the other person; it needs creativity to mobilize creativity.

Third, there’s the reciprocity between expressing the best of oneself and flourishing together as a leadership practice.

Fourth and finally, 11 “new” leadership qualities and attitudes are identified which together develop the full potential of the appreciative leader, who only can really blossom when being fully present.

The reader mustn’t expect a fully structured “recipe” nor a training scenario. The process of becoming an appreciative leader is not built on logic, but on wholeness and oneness. These are by far the best perspectives to read and appreciate the text. The same principles that are covered in this chapter will be active when reading it, and the author can only hope that this reading will nourish multiple perspectives on appreciative leadership.

The Construction of Leadership

A paradigm shift occurs when a question is asked inside the current paradigm that can only be answered from outside it. Marilee Goldberg (in Vogt et al. 2003: 3).

Conversations Create New Realities

We live in the reality created by our conversations and by the stories we tell ourselves. My proposal is that we have conversations which are generative of inspiring realities opening us to other possibilities and that we tell ourselves stories which nourish our love of life and our generosity, positive emotions, and good experiences. Let us think about other ways of seeing, living, and talking about adversity. The words that we use to define problems are negotiable; we can use new languages to move forward.

As leaders it is necessary to promote conversations that provide sense, generate meaning, and move the energy necessary to create the desired future. What do the generative conversations generate? A conversation is generative when we help each other see “what could be” and “what is possible.” This shared vision attracts us and motivates us to undertake actions together. They are actions that have meaning and bring significance to our lives, our relationships, and our organizations. They are actions for a common good motivated by a shared vision.

As a coach I accompany the person in opening up generative conversations that allow them to express their full potential in their social relational context. I suggest to them the need to involve others, the people who are appropriate to work with him or her in supporting them in their desired achievements. We see what conversations are necessary, with whom and when. We create an appreciative tone that allows for the encouragement of the best in each person and in what they can create together.

The appreciative tone is created by setting out a framework in which we can foster the valuing of people in the organization, in the community, or in the family system. I ask questions that allow the client to value how the people in their environment have contributed in the best moments. It is about the person developing an appreciative way of looking at his or her surroundings.

I also establish the need to have conversations that develop the appreciative view of the members of the organization or their family toward the client. We achieve this by asking questions that awaken that view. We explain to the people significant for the client that we are going to invest in some coaching sessions for this person, asking them when they were in their best form – what were they doing and what occurred as a result of their actions? We are going to invest in maximizing their potential; let's imagine that the person gives the best of themselves – what would the manifestation of the best of themselves be like? What will they be doing and how will they do it? On including the vision of others, we broaden perspectives.

I can ask a manager or colleague of my client to tell me the story of when the most effective moment was when they gave him or her feedback. In this way, the manager or colleague becomes aware of what and how the best way of giving them feedback is and what happens when they give it that way. I can also ask them to tell me a story of when they supported my client's ability to be successful. Or I can ask the client's team – what are the challenges that you now need to deal with, and in what way can you be thinking partners yourselves in order to overcome them? Although this question seems to focus at first on the challenges, the intention is to set up a generative conversation about how to support each other by being thinking partners.

It is about helping them to develop lenses of social constructionism with questions such as what stories do I tell myself and which do I tell others? What do I say to myself and to others? How could these stories be more generative? What can I ask others in order to involve them? What can I ask them so that they contribute in the fulfilment of our desired future? What missing question needs to be asked that will open us up to a new dialogue once we ask it? What other points of view can I apply to this situation? How would it change if I did so?

To accompany each other in living with this spirit of freedom, we can ask each other – are you sure? Every time someone makes a convinced statement, we can make them question their convictions so that they open up to bringing in other perspectives.

Co-constructing Multiple Perspectives

Social constructionism makes us aware of the fact that there are multiple perspectives and that to bear them in mind enriches us and allows the collective wisdom to flourish and be shared. Social constructionism is based on the following facts:

- We create our ways of understanding reality and values according to the language we use.
- There are multiple traditions with which to construct the world.
- We exist within multiple realities and together can co-construct new realities.
- Words create worlds.
- We accept impermanence.
- Social realities are not fixed.

- All knowledge is saturated with values, conventionalisms, theories, time, and space.
- The ways of explaining emerge from relationships.
- All social action is open to multiple meanings.
- Alterations in our linguistic practices are powerful.

Appreciative inquiry proposes constructing the new in organizational development and our relational systems, where:

- Innovation eclipses intervention.
- Creating substitutes resolving.
- The emphasis is on collaborative leadership.
- We accentuate positive assumptions about human beings.
- Attention is placed on dialogue more than diagnosis.

On innovating, creating, collaborating, assuming the positive, and dialoguing, we create a fertile generative field. Through relational processes, we create well-being and the world we want to live and work in (Gergen 2011). The dialogue of social constructionism deals with the processes in which as human beings we generate sense and meaning together. We recognize that in the measure that people create meaning, we are sowing seeds for action. The meaning of the action is interlaced. As we generate meaning together, we create the future (Gergen 1994).

Generative Questions Are Leading Questions

Questions can generate creative ideas that foster the right change. The art of asking ourselves questions has important implications, not only for changing our assumptions but also in the creation of new possibilities for constructive action.

The appreciative question does not reiterate the problem, but rather transcends it (Subirana Vilanova 2015). It is a question that:

- Generates curiosity
- Stimulates reflective conversation
- Brings underlying assumptions to the surface
- Invites creativity and new possibilities
- Opens the door to change
- Generates energy, vitality, and advancement
- Channels the attention and focus of the chosen subject
- Centers the intention
- Touches the depth, the what and the why of what you do and what you are
- Connects to meaning
- Leads us to the future
- Evokes more questions

We can ask ourselves, for example: What can we do that might help us change this situation? What possibilities do we have that we haven't yet thought of? What small change can bring about the greatest impact? What solution would benefit us both? What moves and harmonizes human relationships?

The way of perceiving and understanding a situation can change in an unsuspected way, and it can be approached from a new angle. It can improve our emotional bonds and our work relationships. These are questions that lead us to a constructive reflection. They arise from an appreciative perspective and stimulate appreciative dialogue. Appreciative inquiry is based on formulating questions that facilitate motivation, cooperation, and the co-creation of a better reality.

Contrarily, the following questions anchor us in negativity and reiterate the problem: What is the biggest problem here? Why did I have to be born into such a problematic family? Why are you so often wrong? Why do we still have these problems?

The questions lead us either to stay stuck in the past, to live and learn in the present, or to generate transformation. There are questions that are incentives to transform, for example: What's the point of being trapped by stress and bitter feelings, in a void, and without achievements? How can I move on? Why am I going to carry on with these recurring experiences, which repeat themselves time and again? Why isn't my life going as I want it to? These questions invite us to review our internal programming and the perceptions, beliefs, and memories that block our progress.

To formulate powerful questions, it is important to become aware of assumptions and use them correctly. Vogt et al. (2003) put this example, contrasting the question "What did we do wrong and who is responsible?" with "What can we learn from what has happened, and what possibilities do we see?" The first question assumes error and blame, and the person who has to answer it will without a doubt go on the defensive. The second question encourages reflection and stimulates learning and collaboration among those involved.

In silence, meditating and relaxing the mind, the circuits of our brain calm down, and we rest on our capacity to invent and to reinvent ourselves. In that space, we increase our creative capacity, and the right question appears, allowing us to find the answer we need. To achieve this, it is good to follow Anthony Strano's (2010: 32) advice:

"Learn to ask questions and let go of wanting answers.
When I am too focussed on answers, I lose them.
Relevant questions are like brooms
that sweep the mind and create a clean space.
The mind needs clean space.
Answers enter clean space."

Powerful Questions

We can see the difference between appreciative questions and other kinds of questions by considering some typical questions in traditional problem-solving, which focus on looking more deeply into the problem and its causes, for example:

Tell me, what is the problem?
 What is it that doesn't work?
 What is worrying you?
 What do you need help with?
 What is upsetting you?
 What doesn't work?
 What will you do about . . . ?
 What do you think made this happen?

Let us see what the questions in appreciative inquiry and in generative proposals are like:

What gives you energy?
 What do you most value about yourself?
 What is it that you most want?
 What worked well before?
 What works well now?
 What is it that first attracted you to . . . ?
 What did you do to contribute to . . . ?
 How do you see yourself when you . . . ?
 How do you want to keep going forward by and for yourself?
 If your worries were solved, how would you feel? What would be happening?
 What would you do? How can you contribute to this ideal situation occurring?
 What conversations should you propose and with whom?

Mobilizing the Creative Potential from Within

When strength touches strength, or hope touches hope, or the inspiration of one touches the inspiration of another, then instead of languishing, human systems tap into the upward spiral of mutual elevation or mutual upbuilding. There is a positive contagion or spread, like a spark of inspiration turning into a flame, and that flame becoming an Olympian torch or legacy. David Cooperrider, preface to Subirana (2013: 14).

Creativity

To spark inspiration and unleash our creative potential, we need to live free from our self-limiting conditionings; we have to know ourselves better, question our beliefs, clean out the storeroom of memories that keep us anchored in the past, and overcome our fears, which hold us back and block our immense creative energy.

Which Creativity Do We Need at This Time?

I explored the many dimensions of creativity in my book *Creativity to Reinvent Your Life* (Subirana 2010). In it I reflect on the intention of our creative intelligence and

creative impulse and on the question what is the creativity necessary in this time that we are living in? The answer includes multiple dimensions.

We are in the need of creativity that allows us to leave behind stressful routine and that leads us to find the necessary connections to help us as human beings to create a better reality for everyone.

We need a creativity that comes out of an awakened consciousness to create a new paradigm: a new world.

We need creativity that doesn't only help you but that accompanies you and brings others out of their bodily cages of selfish pleasure, of their mental prisons and their comfort zones. This creativity has to be daring, elevating, and transforming.

We need a creativity that opens, that opens our eyes in order to see and become aware, that opens closed hearts to feel and be, that opens limited minds to enter into the unlimited and into the sacredness of existence, a creativity that opens, so that repressed beings might express their potential without fears.

We need a creativity that is generous and encourages us to go from a culture of clinging on to a culture of gratitude and generosity.

We need creativity that nourishes, a creativity that unites and upholds. Such creativity neither destroys nor wounds; it sustains transformation so that people take the risk and do not return to their old patterns of behavior.

We need creativity in conjunction with and associated to nature, respecting and sustaining the planet.

We need a creativity that respects. Out of respect we create with the energy of good feelings, of understanding and valuing the space of the other. Respectful creativity encourages and creates out of humility and not out of violent provocation.

We need a creativity that offers space to be, to exist, and to allow the other to be.

We need a creativity that moves out of the energy of the awakened consciousness, that causes another energy to circulate in the human system, in the thoughts and feelings, in the mind, the intellect, the memory, and the heart. Creative energy opens windows and awakens sleeping consciousness. It is an energy which facilitates positive transformation. It is healing and the creator of a new paradigm.

We are in the need of responsible and conscious creativity. Each one of us is responsible for the experiences that we have. Let us be conscious that we create our own reality. Is this the reality that we want? Are we prepared to sacrifice ourselves in order to create a better reality for everyone? Not a painful and unhappy sacrifice, but rather a sacrifice of letting go of our ego and giving ourselves to the other.

We need constructive creativity. In a world where it seems that we are creative through destroying, we should be capable of coming out of that inertia in order to build. Let's be clear: We destroy our body by feeding it bad thoughts, clinging to feelings of blame, victimism, hate, and bitterness. We feed it badly. We use it to oppress and damage. We destroy the harmony in our relationships because we are in the state of asking, needing, and wanting the other to satisfy our needs and longing. When the other isn't as we would like them to be, we destroy the harmony, generating a deep unhappiness. We destroy the environment, using the resources of nature without respect, for selfish, greedy, and exploitative ends.

We need an inclusive creativity that embraces, welcomes, and generously generates a spirit of union, like the three musketeers: one for all and all for one. Personal health, the health of the planet, and the health of humanity depend on us all working creatively. It is a generous creativity that empowers our collaborators and people close to us. It allows them to take decisions in the face of new or unforeseen situations that arise daily. It makes them able to manage the unexpected. And this makes us feel more free, more developed, more useful.

We need a creativity that generates newness and makes a difference, beyond talent, craftsmanship, and ability. It is necessary to use the vehicle of talent; the important thing is not to get lost in it, for it not to be an end in itself. The message and the messenger are what are essential. Let us go deeper into this aspect. Let us see what the intention underlying the talent is. Let us be clear and not lose ourselves in embellishing our image in order to appear something that we are not. Let us refine our talent and skills. Let us do it as best as we can. But let's not disconnect from the essence.

Finally we need a practical creativity, whose end is not to impress or to give great ideas, but rather to generate a true transformation: a metamorphosis, an individual but not selfish creativity. What is the intention behind our creativity? Do we want to use creativity to carry on clinging? To keep power? Let us revise our intention and motivation so that our creativity is unique but not narcissistic, but rather personal and universal.

With these dimensions of creativity, we will go from an ego-system to an ecosystem. In the ego-system, everything is about me and mine: What can I get? What can I control? How can I have more power? In the ego-system we have lost trust. The ego-system lacks generosity, which means there is neither true leadership nor creativity. It does not allow for the emerging of the power of the knowledge, of the competences, of the talent and the motivation of each collaborator, because one is centered on oneself. If we don't allow this to arise, the innovation is not possible whereby there might be enthusiasm, collaboration, and, above all, the risk of taking on new challenges. In the ecosystem it is all about all of us. If we continue to have the ego-system as a culture, we will have serious problems that will put our survival into question and the culture of greed and violence will prevail.

You Can Be More Creative

You are capable of creating from different creative spaces.

You can create beauty and friendship.

You can sow happiness and cheerfulness.

You can create reconciliation and peace.

You can establish harmony and happiness.

You can also create ill feeling and hate.

You can generate rejection and abandonment.

You can create a jungle or a garden.

You can generate thorns or flowers.

You can be fragrant or odorous.

You can give out and love generously or beg for affection and attention.

You can forgive and become free.

You can.
You can do so much and so well.
You can be and shine.

The creative power is in your hands when you reside in the core of your being. That way you will no longer be a shipwreck at the mercy of the currents, the waves, and the wind; rather, you will be at the helm of your life. The currents are the situations that you have lived through and that have left marks on you in the form of scars, of relationships that have to be ended, of aspects that you have to reconcile in yourself, of habits that control you. They are the underground currents that move within you and cause you worry, unease, and anxiety. The waves are the multiple influences that put pressure on you, influences of people, situations, and work. The winds are the cultural, religious, and social conditionings; the economic, political, and work conditionings; and the sports team following conditionings. These winds enter to our minds and condition our decisions and actions.

If we do not hold on firmly to the helm of our life, the currents, the waves, and the winds will continue to dominate us. What does it mean for you to be at the helm? How can you grasp it strongly and allow it to guide your life? Can we walk toward having self-mastery and self-leadership, returning to our creative source?

Returning to the Creative Source

“Every act of creation drinks from the fountain of Life. Those who connect to that fountain become creative beings. We have in front of us an invitation to unfold all the potential of creative freedom that we have, and it helps us to understand that what is at stake is much more than doing things; it is to turn our very existence into a creative act. To do so we have been brought to existence: to give a unique form to the portion of Life that has been placed in our hands. Being depositaries of the co-creating act of existence like this is permanently made up of two tempos: receiving and giving, taking on and turning one’s own life into an offering.” Javier Melloni in the prologue of *Creativity to Reinvent Your Life* (Subirana Vilanova 2010: 1).

Upon unfolding all your sleeping creative potential, an endless amount of possibilities appear before you and for you. You become a co-creator of a new culture in which the art of being and, from being, peace, love, and beauty make up an intrinsic part of the same. For this, it is necessary to return to the essence, to the creative source of each human being, and, from there, to create a new being and a new world.

This creative force of each human sometimes gets blocked and needs to be rediscovered. To reconnect to your creative source, to rediscover your creative force, first we need to go inward, to tap into the creative potential that lies within. Let us explore the paths within.

Paths Within

We are very taken up with searching outside of ourselves. We are overstimulated. We live a lot in the mind. We have even left our hearts in order to take up residence in the

mind. On making the mind our home, we stay busy by filling it with worries and endless thoughts that stir and make us act in a different way than we might wish to. Thus, we bury our true heart, the heart of the soul.

We forget the resources that lie within us. Let us remember them in order to leave behind the meaningless void that so much distraction and noise leaves us in. Let us remember wisely. One of the keys to transformation is knowing how to forget and how to remember. With remembering we return to our essence; we bring back the memory of our essential being. The capacity to forget and to remember is an extraordinary faculty that we have. If we know how to use it, we will achieve wholeness. Don't forget what you have to remember. Don't remember what you should forget.

To feel complete, it would help you to stop looking outside for what is already within you. You were born with it, but you were probably never taught to look inside yourself, and you have spent your life searching on the outside. This brought about misencounters on the path of life, disappointment, and constant dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction arises from an inner emptiness that you want to fill. But when you are like a bucket with holes in it, it doesn't matter how much water you pour in. You run after the desires brought about by this deep dissatisfaction and you stop being present. You are trying to achieve something; when you do, it dissolves in moments like sugar in the mouth. And the dissatisfaction seems impossible to overcome.

To stop being the puppets of our desires, appreciative inquiry proposes that we connect to our essential desire (Cooperrider et al. 2008). Knowing what you want helps you to align your energies; that way you manifest the power of a clear intention. Everything we do is propelled by an intention and motivation. It might have as an end the satisfying of a need, a desire, or an addiction, or to achieve a more intangible aim or wish. It is an essential desire because it is aligned with revitalizing and living from your positive core. We need to open the doors within to see what is it that we really need and who we really are.

My experience has shown me that, to open the doors of our inner realms and go into them, we should trust, be brave, and connect to our strengths. To do so, it is essential to be appreciative. In the process of appreciating, you value, recognize, and enhance the beauty of the other and of yourself. Your appreciative presence empowers their self-confidence, opening them up to you and themselves. An appreciative question opens others gently so that they can see without getting blocked or overwhelmed. They open up to enter silently into themselves and listen. Then we listen together. And by listening we discover our essence, our core. By listening we can also discover there is a hidden suffering stored within. Let us explore both aspects.

The Essence: The Healthy and Positive Core

What we long for, what we most seek, lies within us. In our inner space, a core beats that is full of life and of virtues, which in appreciative inquiry is called the positive core, meaning the vital center of our person; it is what makes us vibrate with enthusiasm and the happiness of living, opening us to our full potential. It contains our essence. The positive core includes our competences, skills, and talents, our best

achievements and practices, our strengths and unexplored potential, and our values. It is a core that grows and flowers; it expands and finds meaning in relationships, in giving oneself and sharing. If one keeps it for oneself, it withers. Metaphorically, we could say that the positive core is the seed that becomes the sap that gives life to all living systems; it is the blood that circulates round the body of the system of our relationships and interactions. With appreciative inquiry we detect what forms part of the sap, the blood, and nourishes our organs, giving us life and nourishing us.

The positive core is identified in different ways. For example, with appreciative questions, we can inquire in order to find it and connect to it. We awaken the memory, remembering moments that made us vibrate from the depths of our being and connected us to what in appreciative inquiry we call the positive core. It is about remembering what moves us, discovering it again and feeling it, to thus awaken our deepest dreams and live them. That awakening is a flourishing, an opening to being the best version of oneself and the best version of relationships.

We can also follow a sequence of appreciative inquiry phases which in essence consist of identifying the positive core through *defining* what we want to work on and where we want to go toward and *discovering* the strengths we have that will support us on the journey; we do this by setting up a dialogue between the person and their relational system. The core is expanded in the *dreams* phase, when we generate a clear vision, aimed at results relating to the discovered potential that the person wants to manifest more of in their daily life. In the phases of *design* and *destiny*, a present is constructed, based on proposals that we design. With these we seek to come close to and live the future that we want, based on the strengths of the positive core of the person and of their relational system, that is, their family, friends, business partners, the necessary people in their lives.

In order to live your essence, in your positive core, you need to allow yourself to do so and free yourself of fears, limiting beliefs, and feelings of guilt and bitterness. The person whose spirit is freed of all these things controls their mind, directs their thought, and keeps their attention focused. Their heart is at peace and radiates positive energy and love. Their action is aligned with their values, decisions, and will. They liberate themselves from suffering by embracing it.

Embracing Suffering

Let us look at another important aspect in the journey toward self-leadership and in the longing for freedom. It is the suffering that we store inside ourselves and our relationships. To what extent do we confuse the escape mechanisms of suffering with freeing ourselves of it? One can put up resistance to living a return to oneself, given that, as Thich Nhat Hanh states (1998: 47), “The majority of people are afraid of returning to themselves, because they fear facing the pain that is within them.”

When you have a family member, a loved one, or a friend suffering, you can accept their suffering, but if you want to help them to be freed from it, focus on their desire for growth and in what they long for. You can ask them questions that accompany them in seeing their light, that change the direction of where they are looking and their thinking; instead of focusing on the shadow, let them look at the light and be able to feel grateful.

As a leader and thinking partner, you can contribute to the person before you being able to listen to themselves. You can help them be aware that if they don't listen to what their suffering is telling them, a moment will come when an inner split opens up. They will have fled from their own inner voice that wishes to communicate something to us. In taking on the suffering and making it theirs, they will feel that it is speaking to them. Suffering indicates the possibility of a latent change, a transformation that can lead to greater depth. When they find the meaning of our suffering, it is transformed.

Suffering indicates to us that something new is being born. If we go backward, the very thing calling us to be transformed gets infected. If we take it on board and we go through it, the old falls away and the new is born. It becomes necessary to flow with uncertainty, since one doesn't know what will happen after letting go of the outer covering. You don't know what is waiting for you after that change, and this uncertainty can cause you to have a lack of inner strength. However, when we let go of that which we release, it frees us, strengthens us, and makes us free.

Sometimes as a friend, or if it is the case, coach, the only thing you have to do is listen. You realize that the mere fact of sharing the difficulty, of giving it a name and expressing it, lightens the burden of the person speaking to you. If they identify it, they name it, they listen to it, and we look at it in the eye; we make it human. What happens sometimes is that the shame or fear of what people will think on seeing our vulnerability or weakness, or that they will label us a failure, makes it difficult to share our suffering. Looked at appreciatively and in constructive conversation, that fear is dissipated.

We should learn to accompany others in suffering without judging the other. A loving look that receives that pain and does not judge when someone opens themselves to be listened to and to share helps them to express themselves in order to let go of the suffering accumulated inside them. And the more we think that we would be judged, or seen in a bad light, the more we discover the look of tenderness and understanding of the other who is close to us, and this is profoundly freeing. Having somewhere to express and manifest it unloads a lot of the burden that one might feel. Being seen humanizes us and allow us to go forward. Let us widen our perspectives.

We suffer because we stay stuck in points of view, perspectives, and habits that we refuse to modify. "We only suffer because we think things should be otherwise. As soon as we abandon this idea, we stop suffering. As soon as we stop imposing our own ideas onto reality, reality stops presenting itself as adverse or prone and begins to show itself as it is, without that value pattern that prevents us from reaching it. The path of meditation is therefore that of detachment, that of the rupture of mental frameworks or prejudices: it is a process of undressing to the point that we find out that we are much better naked" (d'Ors 2012: 91).

Residing in Our Being

The deepest reason for lack of peace and excess of anger, fear, and mistrust, be it in personal experience or in human relationships, lies in the loss of awareness of our authentic identity and true nature of being. We tend to base our identity on the

physical aspect (body), actions (our actions and the roles), possessions (our accumulations), place (where we come from physically), and our conditioning (acquired beliefs). Basing our self-esteem on any of these aspects can become a problem, because none of them is permanent.

If you accompany someone, and are centered in your authentic identity, you will be able to empathize with the person's restlessness and unhappiness, helping them to transcend it. With your centered presence, you act as a mirror. You don't need to do anything else, nor say anything special. Being present, you generate a vibrational field that accompanies the other in reaching more authentic aspects of their identity.

Living means being confronted with often destabilizing changes. Possibly, to prevent those, people will cling on to the intellectual discourse of a mind that needs to understand everything, analyze it, question it, justify it, reason it, conceptualize it, see it, and touch it. In the end, their heart stops feeling, blocked by so much analysis and reasoning. These people find it hard to transcend conceptualization. They seek security in concepts. And when change causes them to feel insecure, they can fall into the trap of wanting to cling on to any discourse, or else they become cynical and skeptical. They stop being open to other points of view, and in that state, it is difficult to innovate and go through the necessary transition.

Other people might find their security and sense of identity not in the mind or intellect, but rather in their habits. They react automatically, almost without thinking or reasoning. Habits rule their lives. The past carries such weight that they live situations and relationships according to the habits acquired along the way. These people are trapped in the prison of their past. Their heart stops enjoying life, as they already live the present in function of the past. Their personal history has such a weight that they stop living in the present, feel afflicted, and remain hungry for the oxygen of love. They close into themselves and stop relating freely to themselves and others.

To reside in the heart of being and live life from that central space is to live awakened and aware of the reality that we are the creators of our thoughts, our beliefs, our reasoning, and our habits, which are often culturally and socially conditioned. We can follow them and live accordingly or instead we can challenge them, question them, reinvent them, and reconstruct them in a different way. The important thing is to be aware of our choice. And, therefore, not to complain that "this is what we are like," but rather to take our choice on board and change if we feel like it. There are many perspectives according to which we can live a reality, a relationship, and a moment. "We can choose to live mindfully and heartfully, with full awareness and to live fully connected, not only to connect from ideas, from the mind, but also from the heart. To live in full awareness is to feel life; it is to live with the awareness of an awakened heart" (Subirana 2014: 17).

Such an awakened and aware person lives with joy and vitality, without anguish or anxiety, being open and generous. To be heartfelt is to have a big heart that shares and radiates the best of itself and of that which is outside of itself. It is connected to the supreme force of love, compassion, and peace, and it illuminates them. It is an innocent and contented heart. It is clean and honest.

Heartfulness is having a compassionate heart. It is attentive, considerate to the presence of the other, recognizing and seeing the other. Each of its words, thoughts, and actions can make a miracle happen. A word can open a door to opportunity; a thought can transform a tense atmosphere into one of respect; an action can save a life. A compassionate heart loves out of understanding, forgives, and releases bitterness. It lets go of the past and is grateful to the present. It is strong so as to take on suffering and to live fully the path that heals it. It is a heart that lives in gratitude.

If we live with gratitude, and we practice meditation, the way opens up more easily to stop living in the mind, the intellect or our habits, and to moving to residing at the core of being. Then we are fully present.

Focus on being fully present, open and connected, present in mind and body. I breathe deeply; I observe that my body position is open and welcoming and that my body is sitting straight, in a dignified and alert position. As Eckhart Tolle (2006: 220) says: “When you listen to another person, don’t only listen with your mind, listen with all your body.” It is a question of realizing the importance of nonverbal language. When all your energies are aligned, that is, your awareness, decision, thoughts, feelings, action, and expression, what you say and what you feel become congruent. Sometimes, there are people who say one thing with their mouth, but their body gives off another message. It is about knowing that, for your words to be influential, you should be connected to what message you transmit. It is about believing and feeling what you say.

Cleaning the Storerooms of Your Mind

As leader and thinking partner, you need to explore other possible ways of looking that might help you to break down rusty mental frameworks, and, gently, with grace, with appreciation, you can then go toward the space of the positive core, the vital center of your person, that which makes you vibrate with enthusiasm and the joy of living and opens you up to your full potential.

In order to widen your vision, you can do an observation exercise in silence.

Relax. Breathe deeply. Think: “I am not this situation. I separate from it. I quieten my mind. I think: nothing is permanent. Everything will pass.”

Develop that capacity to free yourself from the influences that diminish you and put out your flame, those that reduce your ability to love, to shine, to feel free, to be at peace. Those influences come from the outside and also from your past and your habits.

It becomes necessary to include the practice of silence and patience and the capacity for reflection, in order not to react instinctively, responding to fear and insecurity out of fright or anger, but rather responding out of your values, trust, love, respect, listening, tolerance, creativity, and inner strength.

Try to clean out the storerooms of your mind, the archives inside your being, so that no habit leads you to react with bitterness, jealousy, hate, and fear. To reach that state of wholeness in which there is a balance between the mind and the heart, feel how you respond in accordance with your values, your positive core. To achieve it, you should overcome the feelings that block that experience; strengthen your

self-esteem, clarity, self-command, and personal sovereignty; and develop the powers that will help you to face problems and transcend influences.

Let us explore these aspects:

- To feel responsive to your values is to live your essence and be connected to your roots. Let the sap of your essence flow through all your being and feed into your life, keeping you energetic and healthy. It is to live your positive core.
- Overcoming the feelings that block the experience of wholeness requires you to explore what diminishes your presence: mental confusion, negative thoughts, blaming yourself, worries, projections, and comparing yourself.
- To extend and maintain clarity, it will help you to be aware and realize where you come from, where you are, where you are going, and what is happening in the here and now.
- To achieve personal sovereignty means to be in charge of yourself. Living in full awareness will help you to get back your inner power in order to deal with problems and overcome debilitating influences.

Expressing the Best of Yourself to Flourish Together

Those that wish to create a new culture, a new society, a new state of things, should first understand themselves. The important thing is for each one to understand themselves in their relationship with another. Jiddu Krishnamurti (1992: 30).

When a human being flourishes, they express the best of themselves. And vice versa. They are creative, intuitive, and life-giving. They promote innovation and renewal from the center of their being and connect to others with happiness and positivity. The one that flourishes feels fully alive, creative, and resilient (capable of overcoming adversity) and feels that he or she is growing and having a positive impact on their environment.

For Martin Seligman (2004), the objective of positive psychology is flourishing, which is based on the five pillars of his theory of well-being. In the theory of well-being, analyzing the PERMA model, Seligman invites us to think about what we have to do to prosper and be happy, and he represents the five essential elements that should be in place in order to experience on going well-being:

- Positive emotions: Well-being is experienced through positive emotions.
- Engagement: Being engaged with something allows us to experience motivation and well-being.
- Relationships: Relationships are important for our well-being. The people who have a positive relationship with others are happier than those who do not.
- Meaning: Meaning comes from serving a cause that is bigger than ourselves. If it is a cause that helps humanity, this gives meaning to our lives and brings us well-being.

- **Accomplishment:** Accomplishment is important insofar as it contributes to our capacity to prosper.

To cultivate positive emotions, we should focus on what works and make it grow and center on what is life-giving. It is also necessary to manage suffering so that it is not devastating and, finally, not to allow certain toxic people or relationships to pollute our inner spaces. Imagine you have a relationship with a person with whom you have created a sacred space, of complete friendship and trust. Then a third person appears on the scene who talks badly of one and another. If you are not careful, a negative perspective can pollute those sacred spaces. Should this happen to you, you might start to imagine things and to think badly; the seed of mistrust may be sown. You opened the door to negativity and unease. In those cases, pay attention so as not to feed the negative assumptions. Better follow the agreement of Miguel Ruiz (1997: 45) in which he advises: “Don’t make assumptions or draw conclusions from everything in a precipitative way. If you do that, you believe that what you suppose is true and you create a reality about it. It is not always positive nor guided by love. Have the courage to ask, clarify, and express what you want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can in order to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and other dramas. With just this agreement you can completely transform your life.”

When assumptions take root in our being, we blame, we complain and we feel anger, we create dramas in relationships, and we lose our handle on situations. Our energy and mental clarity are reduced, and we end up as victims of external factors and of fear, anger, and sadness. It is difficult for us to stop being victims when we keep on with habits of clinging, getting too attached, and depending. With them, our heart loses vitality and our capacity to flourish remains cut off. The pressure that these emotional states generate and the absence of freedom cause us suffering and nurture our feelings of victimhood. We are so accustomed to these forms of suffering that we come to believe they are natural. It is possible to stop going through these emotional upsets when we recover our inner power.

The capacity to decide what we think and feel at each moment, the possibility of choosing our attitude and how to respond in each situation, is our strength and our freedom. We can choose to think and feel in such a way as to flourish and stay open. We have the possibility of using our immense creative power in different spheres of life. However, our beliefs and partial points of view limit us, the past conditions us, and fears prevent us from living out our dearest dreams. When this happens, instead of flourishing in shared living, we get bogged down and we enter into conflict. Then we prefer to be and live alone. We run from conflict and from relational complications. We want peace. And when we feel trapped in relationships that suffocate us, peace disappears, giving way to anguish. We feel misunderstood and flooded with worries. At other times it seems as if we should submit ourselves to the desires of others in order to please them. All this oppresses us. On feeling threatened by the presence of the other, we end up renouncing our individual integrity, too influenced by others and society. We look for security and we stop being ourselves, taking on a personality that follows cultural and social models, not aligned with ourselves.

Then, instead of establishing positive relationships, as Seligman (2004) advises in his PERMA model, our relationships are the source of unhappiness. Our inner misalignment makes it difficult for us to establish healthy relationships. All this pushes us to escape to an arid aloneness or to take refuge in a toxic kind of shared living. Even though we are with someone else, we feel alone and disconnected. We need to learn to live appreciatively.

Living Appreciatively

To live appreciatively is to feel gratitude for everything that life brings you. Whether it is positive or negative, good or bad, you can decide to see the positive side that helps you to value, to be thankful, and to move forward. You may have many reasons to be sad about your past, angry about the things that have happened to you, or fearful of your uncertain future, but you can decide consciously to be grateful for the lessons learned. Appreciate what the people who accompanied you on part of your journey contributed to your life, even though you later went your different ways. Decide to live with appreciative lenses and to hold attractive images of the future which strengthen your trust in the present and your courage to move forward through the uncertainty.

Instead of complaining, decide to be brave and to recognize the oak in the acorn, as Thatchenkery (2006: 8) poetically expresses: “Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to see the mighty oak in the acorn. Metaphorically, it is the ability to see more than the present existence of a small capped nut. It is the capacity to see a strong trunk and countless leaves as emerging from the nut as time unfolds. It is the ability to see a breakthrough product, top talent, or valuable solution for the future that is currently hidden in the present situation.”

The capacity to appreciate arises out of a mental state and from an attitude that shows itself through the skill of perceiving what is valuable and meaningful about oneself, the other, and the world. An appreciative attitude increases people’s capacity to be generative and influence others, and with this, their ability to generate freeing changes is multiplied. Developing appreciative skills helps us to create and increase our happiness and well-being. “Happiness is a mental state, a way of perceiving ourselves and of conceiving of ourselves and the world around us,” states Sonja Lyubomirsky (2008: 54).

When we appreciate ourselves, we strengthen our self-esteem. On discovering and valuing the best of what we have, we provide ourselves with resources with which to deal with life. When this discovery is sincere, we feel an emotional connection to our strengths and capacities. Positive emotions awaken in us – respect for oneself, happiness, hope, and inspiration, among others. With these positive emotions, we open ourselves to learning. Positive emotions open us; negatives ones close us. Thanks to self-confidence, we dare to take on risks. When we appreciate that what we do is important and can make a difference in our lives and in the world, we feel strengthened and we do it better.

When appreciating the other becomes a habit and a vital attitude, we increase the quality of our relationships and we contribute to bringing out the best in people. Some disciplines base their results on appreciating others and on generating expectations for the achievement of surprising results. For example, some methodologies have worked out theories based on what is known as the Pygmalion effect (Cooperrider, Subirana, 2013: 79) to denominate the actions that we undertake due to the expectations that others have of us. We are sensitive to what our significant others expect of us. The expectations of others can change our levels of effort and have an influence on the profound concept that we have of ourselves.

To practice the appreciative perspective with others is to focus on the talents, strengths, and values of the person and see the best in them. It is not to put on to the other what we would like them to have; it is to practice appreciative intelligence. It is to see the oak tree in the acorn.

Increasing our appreciative capacities allows us to create positive images of the future. The emotions awakened by our personal interpretation of images lead us to create an optimistic or pessimistic future in our mind. "Positive emotions arise as we interpret events and ideas as they develop; it depends on whether we give ourselves a moment to find the good, and, once found, let it flow," says Barbara Fredrickson (2011: 21). If we take the necessary time and we have the intention of maintaining an attitude of appreciation, positive emotions will flourish and open the way for us to live out our full potential.

Being appreciative does not mean that I only focus on the positive and on our strengths, but rather that I value our vulnerability as an opportunity, welcome our suffering as a path to walk in order to free us from that which no longer nourishes us, and listen to our doubts and our questions so that they can become the keys which will open our inner realms.

We seek to be seen and to be recognized. Our beings are often conditioned according to how others see us and how their opinions influence us. When we appreciate the other, we see them, we recognize them, and we value them. When we appreciate, we move forward: our mind opens up to receive, to recognize new data, and to learn. Appreciating, we feel surprise and curiosity. When we appreciate, we discover the best of "what is" and we open ourselves to see "what could be." Appreciating with passionate and absorbing effort, in which we invest emotional and cognitive energy, helps us to generate a positive image of the future that we desire. In appreciating, new values emerge.

To look at the value offered by appreciation, let's begin with your own experience.

Remember a moment in which you were appreciated, a moment when you felt that others valued you. Perhaps they recognized you for what you were doing, for what you were, or for what you were sharing. You can remember it now and, when the memory arises, reflect upon the questions:

How you felt?

What happened?

What effect it had on you?

Now, stop reading these pages for a while and remember that moment. If several come to mind, remember one in particular. Write it down.

Remember what you felt when you were appreciated.
How did it help you?

When I have done this exercise in workshops, the result is generally that when people felt appreciated, they flourished. Being appreciated made them feel stronger, loved, seen, and cared for, and their self-esteem increased. When we see each other with appreciation, we open the pathways to flourish together.

Flourishing Together

In order to flourish together, it is important to understand the habits that we have created which influence, condition, and tie us down. We were not born with them; we created them as we went along. Some are habits that deprive us of our personal freedom; others limit our potential. It might even be that these habits come to generate a slavery or addiction on an emotional and mental level. Some habits have been cultivated in the midst of relationships that, in the end, became dependent and toxic. Then we lose our freedom.

Freedom consists, among other things, of being capable of thinking, feeling, and expressing our thoughts and feelings, without being conditioned by external factors nor the negative tendencies of our personality and without causing pain. Yes, we should take circumstantial factors and relationships into account, time and place, but we should not act as victims of all of it; rather, it would be healthier to take care of others and ourselves. The person who acts like a victim feels that they cannot be at the helm of their life because their relationships are controlling them and circumstances overwhelm and confuse them. At the least, if we feel conditioned, let us be aware of it and of the possibility of choosing other perspectives. And, depending on the conditions, of choosing the best to care for ourselves and others.

Flourishing together is about being capable of living in positive emotions, in the feelings that exalt our life, and in opening up assertively the conversations that matter to us and that lead us forward. It is to be able to go through negative emotions without drowning in them.

In order to live with greater freedom, let us learn to ask ourselves the powerful questions that will act as keys that open doors for us. This will help us to broaden our vision and be more aware. Asking ourselves the right questions helps us to receive the necessary answers. Even if we have the answer in front of us, if we haven't asked the question, we will not receive or perceive the answer. If we can formulate the question, we will see that the answer is at the threshold of our door.

To formulate the question that will open us up and free us, we should understand the context and the fact that we live by basing ourselves on a series of beliefs that make up our view of life, our attitudes, our decisions, and our behavior. These beliefs are sociological, psychological, cultural, political, religious, and spiritual. They are beliefs about what is good and what is bad, about good and evil, about what success is and

what failure is. And so on to an endless list of beliefs that make up our conditionings and the status quo in which we live. Let us open ourselves to other points of view and learn to question appreciatively. If we didn't do this, we would bring about a defensive attitude and push people to stick even more to their own convictions.

What is it that leads you to be convinced of something? Are you sure? Can beliefs free us? Or, in sum, do we have to transcend certain beliefs? In the experience of contemplative silence, we transcend everything, including our individualistic and dual self. We enter into the dimension of pure clarity. As Pablo d'Ors (2012: 32) expresses: "When you no longer have nor are anything, you are finally free. You are the inner territory itself; not only are you in your homeland, you are your homeland." In this pilgrimage toward your homeland, the destiny of freedom is not far away or outside; it is a second and a millimeter away. It is you and it is in you.

Shared Living

"Embodied in transitory organic structures, human life is characterised by the exclusive capacity to think, imagine, go into the infinite space of the spirits. It is from here that the presence is projected, from the inner power, of which it is necessary to be fully aware for its opportune usage. And for trust in oneself, a vital condition for the presence to be "effective" in the personal dimensions (internal) and the collective (external, relational). The ideal is to obtain the benefits of the "reciprocal presence" (in oneself and in others). It is necessary to share. Share with others. Be compassionate. Be crazy about something. It is necessary to not let oneself get trapped by routine, by pessimism. Creative excess is our hope. The future, I like repeating this, is still to be made.

The world must change. Another world is possible, but we must, in the first instance, change ourselves." Federico Mayor Zaragoza in the prologue of *El Poder de Nuestra Presencia, una Guía de Coaching Espiritual* (Subirana Vilanova 2012: 18).

True inner power is developed by those who live and work in relation to other people, not those who distance themselves from others. We do things for others that we would not do for ourselves. On relating to each other, we widen our mental limits and make our hearts bigger. In relationships and in shared living, our ego defenses and the games played by the personality are activated, leading us to greater awareness and consciousness and, therefore, to greater personal growth and development. In shared living, we bring our inner qualities and powers into play: tolerance, the capacity to adapt, listen, understand, shape ourselves, forgive, communicate, flow, discern, not be influenced, and not depend. When we develop the appreciative stance, our living together is kinder. We learn to be and to love in a broader way.

What would it be like if our relationships were to flourish? How would new and revitalizing energy flow in our exchanges? Relationships are renewed when each person in the relationship is linked to their essence and connected to their being. They have done their inner work and have a rich personal dialogue, generally manifesting themselves as a person of integrity. They don't need the other out of selfish motives, nor do they need to hide in them; instead, they complement each other. Thus, an option of peaceful and enriching shared living is created in the present and for the future.

Meeting the other out of the wholeness of our being offers us a creative and complementary bond. As long as we are meeting the other out of our dependent needs or our deficiencies, relationships will continue to be nests of conflicts and misunderstandings.

Understanding Each Other

Understanding is necessary in order to relate to the other without losing yourself in them. Sometimes the other influences you in such a way that you lose your core, your center. If you understand yourself better, you will find it easier to stay faithful to yourself and your principles. That way, in relationship with the other, you don't betray your principles. You remain faithful to yourself. What does this fidelity to yourself mean? Faithful to which part of yourself? You can be faithful to what you would like to be, or faithful to your constant desire for being, faithful to what you have been, faithful to a memory of yourself that you keep as memento, a picture inside you. You can be faithful to an agreement or a way of acting. It is possible to be faithful to what you want to be and not to what you have been. It is a question of being aware of what happens in you on being in the presence of the other, remaining in your center yet open at the same time to understand and receive.

When you understand yourself, it is easier to understand the other. Understanding helps you to stay faithful and committed to an agreement with yourself and with the other. Only when you understand your relationship with the other will you be able to understand your relationship with the whole, with society. The consequences of relating out of misunderstanding are mistrust, fighting, antagonism, confusion, infidelity, dividedness, and duality. Developing understanding requires attention, full awareness, active listening, looking at and seeing oneself, in order to awaken together with the other so that the relationship is a process of self-revelation.

Relating to the other out of personal understanding is the path to liberation, as Krishnamurti (1992: 30) explains: "When one understands oneself in relation to another, the relationship does not turn into a process of isolation, but rather into a movement that allows us to discover our own motives, our own thoughts, our own searches; and that discovery is the beginning of liberation and transformation. Only this immediate transformation can give origin to the fundamental, radical, revolution that is so indispensable in the world. Revolution inside separated walls is not revolution. Revolution only comes when the separation walls are destroyed. That is possible only when one is no longer seeking power."

Sharing Power

Power is a drug. It is difficult to become unused to it. Influencing others' lives might relieve us of our own doubts. When people feel obliged to pay you attention, you have the option of rewarding or penalizing them. Power has a positive effect on our own insecurities.

Power is associated with control. The obsession to control is usually based on mistrust, the lack of real self-esteem, insecurity, and the fear of uncertainty and freedom. Taken to its extreme, it means an aversion to risk, resistance to change, and the inhibition of one's own and others' creativity. The obsession for control often arises out of the incapacity to recognize and appreciate the value of spontaneity and happiness.

The individual contribution to a team offers a creative impulse that flourishes with the support of the community. When the members of a community or team create together, anything is possible. We are all affected one way or another by the social or organizational system we belong to, and, in the same way, our individual actions influence others and depend on them to a certain extent. When we are aware of this interaction and recognize its value, not only will we think about what we want on an individual level, but we will take others into account. We will consider how achieving our objectives will influence them, and, vice versa, how they can influence us, and how that influence can strengthen us all positively and benefit the world.

We can ally ourselves and form a team, sharing the power like jazz bands do, whose musicians alternate between being the solo and being the followers of the solo. That way we will support each other in playing the game of life together. Shared power generates co-responsibility, complicity, and co-creation. Good relationships are those in which we add up and, together, we are better. We stop comparing, competing, criticizing, and being jealous. We move on to cooperate, join together, value and support one another. We are partners in creating a better reality for everybody.

One of the aspects that prevents us from creating and living out this complicity is the primordial instinct to protect our individual self and be ourselves. That is why we try not to let ourselves feel invaded, attacked, bothered, or dominated by others. This leads us to want to defend our terrain and move within a defined individual space. That is why sometimes we reject others and, with our attitudes, we give out messages such as "Don't come close, don't bother me." The end repercussion of this is that we are alone and isolated.

On living together with others, we haven't learned that one of the spaces important to know, connect to, and define is the inner space. When we cultivate the inner space of the self, we become aware that nobody can take away from us what we are, or our inner qualities; we can feel comfortable among the multitude and not have to defend our space because our assertive attitude and the connection with our positive core protect us. We feel love for ourselves and for the other. To achieve this we need to cultivate good feelings.

Cultivating Good Feelings

Let us learn the art of loving, of being free, and of allowing others to be. Authentic love flows freely; it is healing and never wounds. You give yourself to the other. It is a self-giving where you share of yourself without denying yourself or sacrificing your positive core. You transcend your "I-ego" without losing yourself or getting

stuck on to the other. To reach that state in a relationship, one needs maturity and personal evolution. The majority of people love each other and tie each other down. When we lose freedom, happiness becomes a distant memory, and well-being gives way to unhappiness and to bad times.

Self-knowledge makes it easier to move on from fear to a way of loving that is richer, more tolerant, and relaxed. Emotional love can flourish into true lasting love as the initial fire of the emotions grows cooler and is substituted by a wiser and more mature perception. True love needs a fresh and renewing atmosphere, one without fears.

With a preoccupied mind and a closed heart, we cannot see and receive new ideas, opportunities, and even people into our life. Let us learn to let go of the past and forgive in order to live wholeness in shared living in this moment. It is about cultivating good feelings and cleansing ourselves of bitterness. In cultivating values such as peace, serenity, love, freedom, and solidarity, we will overcome deficiencies and feel stronger. Such a heart ends up becoming a lamp that dissipates the dark. A heart like that lives in the now. The return to the now means to embrace what you are and what the other is and welcome the present moment. You usually mold your expectations according to situations and to people. However, you can shape your life to be open to receiving. When you receive, you give, you give yourself, and in this giving you receive once again. In this reciprocity a dance of joy is created. We flourish together. Together we create a new reality that arises out of being centered in our positive core, of sharing the best of ourselves.

Develop Your Full Potential to Be an Appreciative Leader

Reality is conditioned, it is reconstructed and, often, it is created through our anticipatory images. Change begins in the images that we have of the future. (Cooperrider, in Subirana 2013: 70).

The ideal for us is to live to our full potential, flourishing together with others. We can be more creative. We can construct our best present, respecting the environment. We can construct our best present taking each other into account, seeing and recognizing each other. We can feel each day with joy and gratitude. We can broaden our mind and the power of the imagination and widen our heart and the power to love. We can do all this with the intention of building a more habitable world together with others, in which each one of us might live to their full potential.

Qualities and Attitudes

What do you need to live the intensity of the instant, to savor the beauty of this moment, to connect to your full potential and open it up so that it can show itself? Some of the necessary fundamental elements in order to develop your full

potential are connection to your essence (your positive core), concentration, mental availability, trust, positive images, commitment and courage, curiosity, continuous learning, inspiration, connection, and finding the balance. Let us look at them in brief.

Connection to Your Essence: Your Positive Core

In the section: “The Essence: The Healthy and Positive Core,” I looked at the importance of finding our essential being and connecting to our positive core. On living connected to our essence, we flourish and contribute to the flourishing of others.

Concentration

Concentrating helps you to control distractions until they are dissipated. It is the state in which the mind focuses on an object, on a thing, a word, an image, an idea. The mind wanders for lack of mental discipline, lack of clarity and will to achieve it, or lack of vision and passion for what one wants. Sometimes it is a matter of putting limits to our distractions and interruptions. It might help us to develop our capacity to concentrate if we create positive thoughts connected to what motivates us and what we want and use them as affirmations to strengthen the concentration. We can create a list of thoughts that are like keys to be used to open the flow of inner positivity. For example: I can; I don't let myself be influenced; I am love; everything was as it had to be; I accept it and I let it go. If we focus on something we like, it is easier to concentrate.

Meditation is a fundamental practice with which to develop concentration and be capable of thinking what we want to think, avoiding repetitive, useless, or negative thoughts. Meditating helps you to silence the unnecessary voices and thus develop the capacity to be centered and concentrate.

Mental Availability

Learning to release, let go, and detach oneself, one opens up a space in the mind and being. The mind, on no longer being oversaturated with information and unnecessary thoughts, has space and can be available. It is a question of keeping an open attitude. Being curious and feeling curiosity.

Being available requires serenity. Serenity is a natural state of being. It is only possible to be serene when we stop wanting to control situations and people, when we accept uncertainty and impermanence as natural states of the constant change that living implies, and when we are at peace with our acts.

Within yourself, you will find serenity. If you flee from yourself, you will not learn to manage your thoughts nor to transcend your noise. If you take inside you one of the issues you are trying to deal with, you will not find yourself, because that issue will take up too much space, covering up the essential. You will remain connected to that issue and the people involved in it.

With a calmed mind and a serene heart, we know how to pick up on and understand the signals that situations are giving to us, and we also pick up on the signals of the time, of the moment that we are living in. We are more available.

Trust

Trust is a basic willingness to flow in life and deal with its uncertainties and complexities successfully on an emotional level. Without trust there is no hope, freedom, and tolerance nor the possibility of learning from one's errors, meaning that it is difficult to build one's self-esteem and build healthy relationships.

Hellenic wisdom denominated *empistosini*, or "believe in," to the term trust. The word *confide* derives from Latin and, in fact, could be translated as "sin fiducia" or "item given by the one who contracts as security against the fulfilment of their obligation." Without shared faith, we cannot have projects in cooperation. As relational beings, confidence (trust) is basic in order to go forward in the expression of our full potential.

One thing is the trust or belief in oneself and self-confidence; another is trust in others, in the future of humanity, in our political leaders, and in the company project that one might be participating in (hetero-confidence). The trust of others toward us, or trustworthiness, is another. When we trust, and are in an environment of trust, it is easier for us to live our full potential.

We generate trust when we show ourselves to have integrity; we want the good of the other; we demonstrate the ability to meet their needs; we are appreciative, adopt a positive emotional tone, and maintain good self-esteem. Both people and social systems are more disposed toward trust if they possess inner security, if they have good self-esteem and self-confidence, if they are within themselves in an empowered way.

Positive Images

The images that attract and inspire us give us strength to change structures and improve the economy. The changes that are substantial and sustained over time do not begin in the economy or in structures, but rather in the images we maintain. These push us to change or to stay stuck and unable to move forward. Change is deeper to the extent that we are capable of creating new images of the future that are attractive and that stimulate us to be creative. Positive images have an influence on personal, relational, political, social, cultural, communal, and organizational change. They turn into guiding images that attract us toward constructing the future we long for.

In the years of my experience in sessions accompanying people, I have realized how images mobilize their inner world. When the image that we have changes for one that is more positive and attractive, our vision changes, our attitude is modified, and our vital state improves. When we are stuck in the images of the past, especially in those based on what didn't work, what betrayed us or deceived us, change is more difficult or doesn't happen because, on bringing those images to the present, we remain blocked. We feel anger, fear, or sadness, and we find it hard to move forward.

If you go out into the world in the morning with your mind full of pessimistic images of what the day will bring, your attitude will be sad or resigned. If, on the other hand, you go out into the day with images that inspire you, your attitude will be more proactive and you will go through your day in better conditions.

Focusing on what works, and on what we most want, helps us to find positive images of our experiences. It is from that positive emotional space that we can

perceive the future that we want. Keeping it on our horizon, our inner potential flowers and leads us toward what we want to reach.

Commitment and Courage

Commitment unleashes power and invites the universe to help. Without commitment we do not move forward. Without commitment we do not grow. I realize that many people set out to do things that they do not do because they do not commit themselves to them. Our will has weakened. We are the puppets of our desires and of circumstances, and our determination has stayed dormant or is hanging from a thread. With difficulty will you be able to take your highest longings to your daily life if you don't act with commitment?

You need a level of commitment that is passionate and sincere, that helps you to overcome the weaknesses and events and unforeseen things that place themselves in your way. With commitment you will see how your energies flow. You have to propose it to yourself; you must want to, decide to, have the willpower and do it. Now, commit yourself and act. Dare to commit yourself. Commit yourself in a decided way to the practice of new attitudes, thoughts, and actions. Cultivate your wholeness; you deserve it. Dare to free yourself of what you don't need any more, of what isn't yours, of what has already gone.

Goethe described (1835: 214–30) the results of commitment thus: “Until one commits oneself, the doubt is there, the possibility of going back, always without benefit. With regards to all acts of initiative (and of creation), there is an elemental truth, the ignorance of which kills an endless number of ideas, as well as splendid plans: that at the moment that one truly commits oneself, Providence also acts. To help someone, all kinds of things occur that, without having taken the decision to commit, would never happen. A whole series of events are set in motion out of the decision, bringing about, in one's favour, all kinds of unforeseen incidents, encounters and material help that no one would ever have dreamed might have happened. Anything that you can dream that you can do, begin to do it. Daring carries with it genius, power and magic. Start now!”

Committing yourself implies connecting to your dreams, keeping them in your vision. Don't lose sight of the horizon or the aim. Clarify your goals. Create the best in yourself, offer the best of yourself, be your best version, and don't feed the other versions (the mediocre ones, the atrophied ones, the infantile, the complicated ones). If your horizon fades away and you feel confused, delve into yourself. Enter into silence. Wait. Don't lose yourself in an impulse. Listen.

Curiosity

Feel curiosity for everything that happens inside you and for everything around you, not taking at face value the automatic answers that your ego gives to your questions. Always look for your inner truth and what is authentic on the outside, so as not to get carried away by mirages. You can ask yourself:

- What do I want for myself?
- Why and for what do I exist?
- What does life ask of me?

What is it offering me to do?
What do I do? Or what am I doing? What do I do it for?
What do I pay attention to? What am I focusing on?
Am I carried away by my attention, am I present or absent?

Being in the present in this moment, you reinforce your essence and the essential. Which deserves joy (not sorrow!). On observing, you can redirect your attention.

To develop our full potential, we should be alert and aware of not believing that we have reached our goal when we are perhaps only half-way. Mariana Caplan (1999) explains this well in her book *Halfway Up the Mountain*.

Continuous Learning

We never know enough, although paradoxically everything that we need to know to be happy and to be fine resides within us and reveals itself and flowers in our relational spaces. As we inquire, we discover that there is more to inquire about, to learn, and to design. This opening keeps us young and mentally agile.

Inspiration

The courage of inspiration is to awaken the creative spirit. It is to inspire creativity, confidence and hope to innovate and create a better future. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010: 123).

Inspiring leaders bring out the best in people; they involve them in creating the vision and values of the organization, in laying down the goals and objectives, and in designing the work process. The appreciative leader is an inspiring leader who communicates by motivating and inspiring.

Connection

Appreciative leaders have the capacity to connect with all that there is. Naturally, this begins with the question of how the leader connects with their positive and healthy core. Then the connection with others is determined to a large extent by the ability to establish an open and trusting relationship. Humility, openness to feedback, and embracing the unknown are essential qualities to help establish a connection.

Finding the Balance

Inspiring leaders balance the needs and interests of the employees, the clients, and the business; they strengthen excellence in others, as well as seeking it in themselves. They lead by example and show integrity in everything they do (Cooperrider et al. 2002).

The art of living is easier by building bridges, but that requires balance. It is about finding the balance and not going to extremes. About living with feeling, connected to yourself, to God, to your body, to your heart, to others, to nature, and to time, but not losing sight of your dream or the horizons you are walking toward, or want to walk toward, flowing with the moment, not giving up on your dream, nor getting stuck to your rational plan and no longer flowing.

The constant search for the right balance in what we do is key to any process. What can be added is the element of balance from the performance perspective and through the prism of appreciative inquiry. Traditional managers usually focus on the terrain of performance and of endeavor. In traditional coaching for leaders, the focus resides in the data, the objectives, the control, and the action related to this. Sometimes 360° feedback is used, but almost always to reveal “one single truth,” the truth of the shareholders’ value.

As leaders we need to understand that we should keep the balance between, on the one hand, information, the data, and knowledge and, on the other, the experience, wisdom, integrity, and even spirituality that we can find in organizations and in our workplaces in general.

Try to describe a situation that you consider to be balanced enough to progress – as a certain unbalance is also needed to create movement. What is needed for the balance not to get stuck or too comfortable, but rather for it to maintain it dynamic enough for all those in the organization, including you, to be alert and active? And, how do you see the response of the people who work with you to, for example, the technological developments? How do you feel that their talents, skills, and competences respond to the new situations that arise?

Pay attention to practices of humility, courage, appreciation, and reflection; practicing them will be key to maintaining that balance. The underlying quality of all this is your presence.

Presence

The power of presence is the power to be yourself and have an impact around you just by being present. When you are present, you are alert and attentive, and you are aware. You observe, and you see the visible and feel the invisible. You are connected, connected to yourself, to the other, and to the universe. You feel whole, and from wholeness your being overflows with positive energy. Wherever you go, at each step, you emanate trust, happiness, and hope.

The power of presence arises from a clear intention and an open attitude. The intention of the appreciative inquiry coach or leader includes that of generating trust, openness, and appreciation, leading the client to connect to their positive core.

Let us touch on the factors that contribute to increasing our power of presence. This will help us to understand why some speakers, lecturers, coaches, and leaders have more presence than others; why, in some meetings, one person has more presence than another; why someone else goes almost unnoticed; and why some people become visible and others remain invisible.

People with presence are anchored within and firm. They achieve that firmness from being centered in their positive core: in the sap feeding it from the inside. They are rooted in the present moment like a tree. Their presence comes from having and feeling an appreciative attitude. It is a presence that recognizes and is recognized. It is a transformative presence. They are anchored in their values, and in their experience, in their inner wisdom and emotional maturity. They are their roots. The roots

nourish the trunk of their self-esteem and give them the firmness of being present. They don't need to pretend or prove anything. They are present. Their branches are their different expressions of being, through work, their profession, their relationships and actions.

Increasing Your Transformative Power of Presence

Your presence comes from having and feeling an appreciative attitude. It is a presence that recognizes and is recognized. It is a transformative presence.

Your presence increases by freeing yourself of the world's mirages and conditionings. You dissolve the tensions. You allow yourself to be transparent without pretending. You don't make judgments and you accept. You accept because you embrace multiple perspectives. Out of acceptance, you embrace the moment and people as they are and feel. Even though you don't agree, acceptance helps you not to resist what it is. That way your presence is transformative. You transform out of acceptance and love. Out of resistance, violence, or irritation, you confront but you do not transform.

To do this you connect to your roots. Go to your essence. Uphold the beliefs that allow you to be and flow. Question and leave those beliefs that limit and prevent you from shining. Your appreciative attitude manifests itself even in silence. It is an attitude that is active, positive, aware, and trusting. Briefly described:

An active attitude: Actively present. Actively listening.

A positive attitude: Focus on the strenghts of others and on strengthening them.

An aware attitude: Completely awake and alert, with mastery over "being."

An attitude of trust: Trust allowing the uncovering and flourishing of own and client's resources. Daring to be creative.

Meditation

Meditation helps embodying these attitudes. Meditation implies silencing the mind, focusing, being present, managing the emotions and inner critic positively. Meditation helps the leader to:

- Be impartial observer and not judge.
- Be fully present.
- Listen beyond the words.
- Go beyond the rational mind.
- Connect to the intuition.
- Broaden the field of infinite possibilities.
- Trust in the self and personal resources.
- Be capable of visualizing and making the other visualize, evoking guiding images.
- Flourish and make others flourish in their presence.

Intention

Another aspect to bear in mind in order for our presence to be transformative is related to the intention. Review your intentions and motivations. Why are you going

to say what you are going to say? Why are you going to do what you are going to do? What moves you? Does what you will say or do take the other into account? Are you on the path that is good for you, or are you going to go off track, weaken, and get stuck? Will it free you and will it free the other? Is it what is best for everybody? Remember that the actions that benefit you also benefit others. The actions that are not good for us are also not good for others. “The moment you realise how important it is to love yourself, you will stop making others suffer,” says Thich Nhat Hanh (1998: 32). With full awareness, you can break the chains that keep you trapped in the never-ending circle of desire and rejection. You recognize the desire without getting trapped by it.

Attention

Attention is the necessary key to living free from limiting conditionings and being fully aware, able to own your life and your reactions, taking care of the other, your environment, and yourself. Pay attention to what you think; be awake and alert and be an observer. In this way you will stay connected to the external layers of your identity (your body, your role, your position, and the things you have to do), at the same time as to your inner awareness (what you are and what your being longs for). You will be rooted in your awareness, observing from there what you think and do. It is the “third eye” that sees and pays attention. That is why I propose that perhaps instead of full attention we ought to speak of full awareness. Full awareness helps us much more than simply relaxing us and helping us to overcome stress.

Your attention allows you to direct energy toward whatever you want. However, you should be attentive and decide with great care where you want to direct your energy! Sometimes you fix your attention on to the future that causes you anxiety or you anchor it in the past that causes you anguish. Then, instead of being your ally, it entangles you. The past torments you, and the future causes you anxiety. Your attention keeps you blocked in. You should change the focus of your attention in order to get away from the torment or the anxiety.

Attention, will, and concentration have to go hand in hand. Whatever it is that you give attention to in your life grows and lights up. If you focus on a problem, you increase it. If you focus on what works and on your strengths, you invoke them and express them. Full attention, whole attention, is to be alert, noticing and aware of what is happening in you and around you.

When you are attentive and fully present, you flourish and you express the best of yourself. You are an appreciative coach, thinking partner, leader.

Summary: Living in the Questions

Appreciative leaders, coaches, and thinking partners live more in the questions than in the answers. They don't feel that they have to give answers and are comfortable in the zone of “not knowing,” the “I don't know.” They trust in their people and client's capacity for learning and they encourage it. They always work toward empowering others.

They are the kind of people who listen, appreciate value, and recognize what gives energy and vitality to the person telling their story. They collaborate in bringing out the potential and skills of the person they accompany. They encourage the appreciative point of view, allowing people to find the available resources that are invisible to “the untrained eye.” In that way they nurture the positive emotions that motivate people to continue with the process.

Appreciative leaders welcome having a thinking partner. A thinking partner holds the space of the leader. Beyond their words, the leader generates a field, and the thinking partner sustains it for them. A thinking partner is an appreciative inquiry coach and leader who not only takes the person’s individual aspirations and talents into account (as in traditional coaching); they also take the context into account: who they work with (aligning personal strengths and values with the system of the organization, the impact of the person on the system they work and live together in). The thinking partner keeps in mind that the person develops in the context of their system. Therefore, it is not only a matter of defining and achieving their personal objectives in their own terms, but rather of including the whole system in the vision, in the conversation and the actions. The leadership coach becomes a thinking partner of the persons with whom they work and accompany.

Other features that characterize the appreciative leaders, coaches, and thinking partners are:

- They accompany people in defining affirmatively the topics of interest, of meetings, and of concern.
- They use positive language that describes what they want and that distances them from what they don’t want and from the language of deficit typical of problem-solving.
- They motivate people to find innovations and strategies.
- They ask questions that allow people to identify their inner dialogues, so that they can observe the quality of the same.
- They make it possible for others to find their guiding images.

The living and practice of all this causes a cognitive, emotional, perceptive, and behavioral opening, which improves performance, and helps people to consider possibilities for the future and change.

In the face of a person’s unhappiness, suffering, or pain, the appreciative leaders, coaches, and thinking partners don’t attempt to relieve their pain, but rather maintain the intention of focusing on helping them in their development and growth. So, they accompany them on a journey which goes from the past and present pain to perceiving the attractor images of the future they want to live. And, on seeing them, on living through them in the visualization and narrating them, the person leaves the space of pain, motivated to go toward where they want to go. They connect to what gives them light and life. One of the keys to holding the space in the relationship with the person we are accompanying is the power of an appreciative and transformative presence.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Improvisation and Transformation: Yes to the Mess](#)
- ▶ [Leader Self-Development, Maturation, and Meditation: Elements of a Transformative Journey](#)
- ▶ [Leadership Convergence: The Dawn of Practical Wisdom](#)
- ▶ [Self-Awareness in Personal Transformation](#)
- ▶ [Teaching Creativity and Spiritual Meaning Using Insights from Neurobiology](#)
- ▶ [The New Leader as Spiritual Hero: The Way of Awakening](#)
- ▶ [Transformative Leadership](#)

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