

DAVID WHYTE LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS

The Three Marriages: Work, Self and Other

Each of us must sustain three marriages in our lives: The marriage with our work and society, the marriage - official or not - with our partner, and the deeper marriage with our emerging selves. To choose between these relationships is to impoverish them all. Work-life balance means creating a real conversation, a live frontier between all three commitments that enriches each area of our lives, allowing it to be simultaneously troubled and emboldened by the others. Join David Whyte for a poetic and compelling investigation of these important commitments of a human life.

Life at the Frontier: Leadership Through Courageous Conversation

Every person and every organization needs an edge or frontier with the world where a real conversation is possible. This creative conversational edge is difficult to sustain but an absolute necessity - not only for good customer service but also for sustaining a vital personal life amidst the continual demands of providing that service. This session will look at the way we can keep our edge with colleagues, customers and especially in our own personal lives, through understanding the essential elements of real conversation.

Participants should take away a key question for negotiating a next practical step in their work lives and a deeper understanding of how to thrive over the long term in a difficult, complex and changing world.

The Inner Necessities of Leadership: Essential Understandings for the Senior Executive

Much of what is written in our executive job descriptions does not describe what we do. Most of the cherished ideas we first brought to our careers about how good work actually gets done are no longer true by the time we have reached the higher levels of an organization. This will be a time to explore some key perspectives for creating a more imaginative executive role, especially through understanding the difficult but essential elements of leading through conversation.

Courage and Conversation: New Perspectives on Leadership

Many of our inherited ideas about leadership do not survive the everyday reality of a changing, multi-cultural world where customers, colleagues and direct reports all wish to be seen as individuals with lives, perspectives and contributions of their own. Increasingly the world refuses to bend to our orders. Customers increasingly view companies who attempt to manipulate them as pernicious, or even worse perhaps, irrelevant. Really creative individuals view companies who patronize them in their employment not as safe havens but as steppingstones to other more liberating organizations. What does strong leadership mean amid all these competing demands? How do we stay relevant, in the game, without always having the last word? How do we provide a strong sense of leadership without coercion or manipulation?

This will be a time to explore some key perspectives for creating a more imaginative sense of what it means to occupy a leadership role, especially through understanding the difficult but essential elements of leading through conversation.

Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity

Work is of enormous consequence to human beings. Through our work in a given field we not only provide for self and family but also, unknowingly, shape our society and our future as we do it. Working is never a passive activity - every moment of doing we are also becoming someone different, someone who has been shaped by the very work itself. Work can be soul destroying, worrying and burdensome but approached rightly it can also be life giving and an absolute gift to others. At its best work is an intimate conversation between what you think is you and what you think is other than you, a place of self discovery and a place we become more visible and knowable to ourselves and to others. Through the insights of great poets and their poetry this should be an evening to re-imagine and re-dedicate ourselves to a deeper understanding of our life's work.

The Core Conversation: Essential Steps for Difficult Times

During times of outer stress or economic hardship it is tempting to give up on previous hopes and ideals and withdraw into the basic anxieties of survival. This will be a day to revisit the core conversations of our work and vocation and look at the essential elements that make up our particular approach to life. We will look at the way previous outer successes can often lead to a fatal preoccupation with peripheries in which we lose both focus and a sense of real satisfaction. We will look at the steps to take in returning home to more necessary and saner simplicities.

We will also look at the way adversity in the outer world can be a friend to us, turning us away from secondary preoccupations and returning us to a more focused but more foundational ground from which to take the next step.

A Few Necessary Steps:

A Radical Simplicity of Approach.

All crucial transitions call for a radical simplification of our wants and needs. Peripheral needs must disappear from view for a while as we return to look at the essentials.

A Willingness to Translate the Simple Approach into Action:

We must simplify both our personal approach and our business approach with a view to clarifying all our metaphorical and actual marginal costs and preoccupations.

An Ability to Create a Third Space Untouched by Anxiety or Worry:

This is a place of spaciousness and inspiration. It is necessary at all times but particularly during times of outward adversity. It is created as an attentive personal daily discipline. It does not mean we have to become perfectly enlightened beings, but that we have a daily disciplined creative visitation to a part of the mind not touched by anxiety, stress or worry. It is exemplified by Wallace Stevens' line: "Perhaps the truth depends upon a walk around the lake."

An Ability to Ask for Help:

The conversational identity is an invitational identity. It asks for help, it draws in our partner, our children or our colleagues to contribute and enlighten on the way to a newer, clearer and often simpler picture for the next phase of our lives.

So much of the way we treat the world and are treated by it depends not only upon the state and the depth of our critical and emotional intelligence but also the depth and breadth of our imagination. How we see the world and how much stress or unhappiness we undergo can depend on the qualities that we cultivate inside the self to actually perceive it.

This workshop will look at the disciplines inherent in creating a perceptive mind equal to the breadth and depth of the world that surrounds us. It is appropriate for all walks of life, but with particular emphasis on the present besieging economic climate for those in leadership positions or living with stressful responsibilities that can easily put us on the defensive, slowly inducing us to create identities that are good at keeping things at bay but not so good at meeting them with courage and conviction.

Through poetry both his own and others' and conversation, David will both inspire and challenge us. Participants will have time to engage in conversations with each other and consider the next practical steps they can take in their own individual lives.