




Dear



This Thanksgiving highlights two forms of gratitude: the sweet anticipation of my first grandchild and the specific satisfaction of facilitating significant leadership successes in individual executive coaching clients. Since each of these experiences represents growth and change, I have been considering the issues that define the ever-changing systems of families and organizations. As a result, I have decided to focus this year's annual exploration on the similarities and differences of the two representative "structures of people" called ***family trees and organization charts***.

First of all, it is a given that we first learn how to interact with others in our families. It is also natural to unconsciously bring the expectations from the experiences of our families into the organizations we choose to join. In addition, the unique dynamics of each are indeed distinct. Each, however, has implications on leadership—a topic that ever interests me.

Some time ago I was asked what I regarded as the single most important part of leadership. My response was and still continues to be that the most critical component of leadership is our mindset or the unconscious way we apply our values and expectations. Clients often need to explore where and how an assumption originated in order to determine whether or not it is relevant in their current situation. Since so many of us are products of protected, narrow, restricted family situations — privileged or poor — we can likewise be limited in our individual sense of self-empowerment that is foundational to courageous leadership.

Unfortunately, people often replicate their negative or nonproductive childhood experiences in their work settings. (I can almost see the “yes” of your nod as your experience with transference resonates with this reality!) In contrast, I’ve observed that clients who were recognized as special and unique as children tend to develop healthy self-esteem and, as a result, create positive, productive environments.

### Two examples support the above observation about transference:

- I certainly remember being told to “get off your high horse”. It still feels daunting to remember the warning. I like to think now that in spite of the fact that the directive lacked empathy it was meant to help me be realistic about what to expect so that I would not be hurt or disappointed if I expected too much (or hurt others in having those high expectations). Many have shared similar stories tinged with ethnic flavors that spice their own memories!
- I also remember a client who grew up in a family that was so deprived that he confused *personal* and *positional* power. (Personal power is derived from one’s individual way to bond with others that invites loyalty and commitment. Positional power is sourced from a role such as a military rank, the head of a company, etc.) Later, as the educated and elevated manager of a large business unit, he was so eager to be the champion of the “little guy” that he was rendered incapable of addressing difficult issues effectively. The result was that he was not considered credible or viable as a leader.

So, **boundaries** need to be clearly identified and distinguished in order for us to effectively and deliberately focus our energy and loyalty.

*My random thoughts about the similarities between family trees and organization charts include the following:*

- Each provides a definition of an individual position of “belonging” that can ground one’s choices.
- Commitments (children in families and ideas or possibilities in organizations) breed new “issues”. Such advances are usually accompanied by rituals or rites of passage.
- Change impacts especially those closest to the one experiencing any new posture. In a family, for example, a marriage not only brings in a new member but also forces a review of loyalties that are often challenging to implement. I’ve often seen in organizations that the presence of a new manager can result in a totally new experience for the members of a unit even though nothing else has changed.
- Elders in both families and organizations have the opportunity to contribute to growth-oriented environments by mentoring the rising stars.
- Each *structure* has the possibility of nurturing or of stifling the full realization of individual potential.
- Agenda’s need to be congruent in each situation. If not, growth is limited and dysfunction surfaces. In a family, conditional love becomes evident. In organizations, productivity suffers.

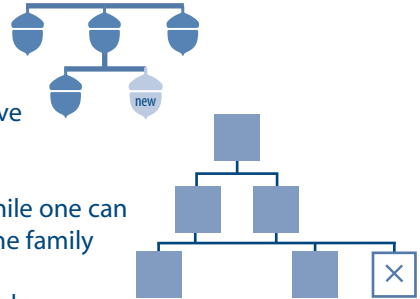
Perhaps when any group really, really functions well together, it has the “feel” of family. I know I was not the only one who cried while watching the poetry in motion of the Golden Girls of our winning Olympic Women’s Soccer Team this summer. When interviewed, they



used the words “team” and “family” interchangeably as they referenced the trust and respect they have for one another.

*Outlined below are my observations of differences:*

- Family trees are permanent. Organization charts are temporary. The implications can be positive or negative resulting either in a sense of being liberated or being trapped.
- Removal in an organization can be at will whereas, while one can choose to be distant from a family, one’s position in the family tree does not change.
- The choice about the structure of an organization can be determined either by internally-focused managerial preference or externally-oriented customer need. Family trees are developed according to one’s time of entry either by birth or marriage.
- Stability of each is vastly different—family trees evolve as individuals enter the family. An organization chart reflects a moment-in-time which can look dramatically different following a merger, a new product or service, or internal promotions.



Even though similar characteristics define both families and organizations, such as a firm hand, a warm heart, trust, etc., one way to “**bridge**” each experience is to apply healthy forms



of confrontation and resolution to each—in other words, *good boundaries*—in order to assure the opportunity for support and transformative exchanges. Tolerating the status quo or even mediocrity are other options with their own implications.

You may have noticed that I'm not referencing family businesses. If you have experienced one in whatever capacity, you already know that the meshing of the organization and the family tree is considerable. That phenomenon could become the subject of another exploration altogether.

Is there a culminating point to this mini treatise? My answer is absolutely, "Yes!" **Consciousness** is my message. Living consciously is the key to unlocking the door of clarity that can promise to open the flow of energy, possibility and even wonder.

YES!

"To what end?," you might inquire. I would respond that our own individual missions are at risk lest we consciously expect what is realistic from each organizing structure.

#### So, a few questions in closing:

- What do we expect to give or receive from our families? From our current organizations?
- To what extent are the expectations similar to or even substituting for the other? What are the implications of these potentially misplaced expectations?

If you are interested, I have provided a worksheet on the back page to capture your answers to the above questions.

Not incidentally, since it is my life's work, let me know if I can help someone you care about *or even you* answer those questions in order to develop realistic expectations or make conscious, courageous choices.

I sincerely hope that these observations are helpful and encouraging in the challenges that invite you and yours to a new level of leadership and living in 2005 and beyond.

*Happy Holidays,*

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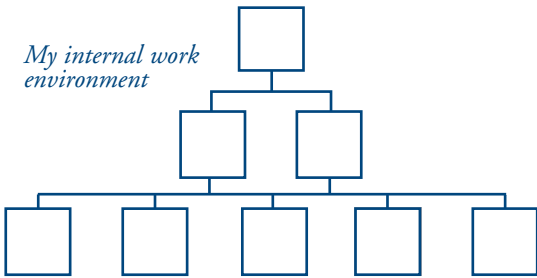
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*My internal work environment*



expectations: \_\_\_\_\_

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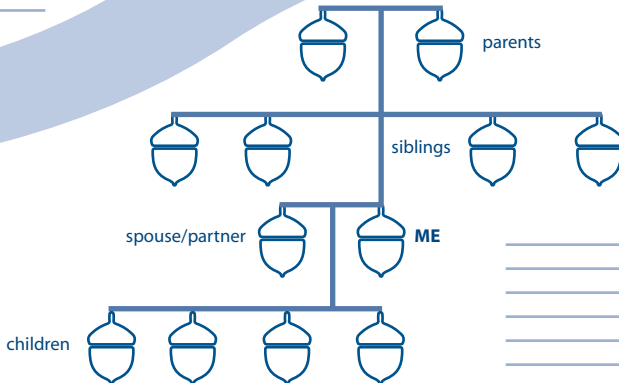
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# worksheet



*My family sphere*

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