

## Self Awareness in Leadership

God offers us a chance to learn and grow with each new experience in our lives. However, some people are able to embrace these opportunities for growth, while others seem to repeat old patterns with little understanding of what God is offering with each new problem, situation, difficult employee, or block to desired goals.

This article will offer a description of the concept of administration as not just a calling but also *aspiritual practice*:

- What does it mean to view our ministries as camp and retreat leaders and administrators as a "spiritual practice"?
- How does self-awareness make us better administrators and more open vessels out of which God's grace and healing presence can flow?
- How do we seek to become more self-aware in the midst of the everyday-ness of all that we are called to do?
- How do we seek self-understanding as a way to be more efficient employees and ministers and also to become more filled with the Spirit of Holiness and the joy of that abundant life that Jesus sought to teach, preach, and embody in his ministry on earth?

### The Two-Way Window

There is a window that exists for those of us in camping ministry as we seek to examine the spiritual practice of living in this fish bowl, ever-on-call, never-have-enough-time existence. If we are able to look both ways through the window, we can become more self-aware, more spiritually grounded, and more efficient camping employees. To look through the window one way is to observe the behavior and performance of our employees and evaluate their success. This is something that we do often. We evaluate on a minute-by-minute basis when in the midst of our ministry as well as doing more formal evaluations at the end of the summer and during yearly job performance reviews. We seek to observe and judge the people with whom we work — be they volunteers, paid staff, young people, board and site committee members, and others.

Are they able to do their assigned tasks well? Are they able to meet the needs of the children for whose care they have been given responsibility? Are they serving the meals with an attitude of care? Are they able to maintain a site in a safe manner while also being hospitable to those whose behavior makes their job harder? These are just a few of the myriad questions that we ask ourselves on a regular basis as we seek to offer hospitality, sanctuary, and care for our guests and a safe but firm place for our staff to learn and grow.

A pause in the midst of the evaluative questioning is necessary for us when an employee or volunteer is not meeting our expectations. Asking certain types of questions of both ourselves and our employees helps us to decide what remedial action to take. Has the person been properly trained? Is the person mismatched or not ready for the job given him or her? Is this simply a time to state that certain duties are a part of the job and a requirement if the person wants to stay in the position? All of these, of course, are questions that we have asked ourselves and our employees.

However, the spiritual practice can enter into our administrative practice when we seek in that moment of pause to also look through the side of the window that looks inward into our own soul and ask ourselves a different set of questions. These questions can be framed in terms of awareness of our own patterns of behavior and what God is trying to teach us through a particular situation. Particularly telling is when we find ourselves in a similar

situation over and over again.

Also telling is when we find ourselves feeling truly disturbed in our "guts" or spirits by a particular employee or volunteer. Viewing our "work" as a chance for spiritual growth allows us to view these repetitions or situations of distress as times when God has given us teachers whom we can choose to learn from or ignore. Looking for the God-moment should not interfere with taking the remedial action with the employee or volunteer. It is an internal and ongoing practice that happens as a part of our prayer connection to the Loving Creator who is seeking to continue to make in us a New Creation.

Viewing the situation as a chance for one's own personal growth can open up new possibilities for God to surprise, delight, and teach us ways of being both in the world (the immediate situation on the site or in the ministry), but also not of the world (always in the midst of seeking connection with God through prayer and meditation). This is where we are invited to step around the corner and look through the window back at ourselves. (And, by the way — we can sometimes learn to look back at ourselves with the same compassion with which Jesus views our humanness.)

To look back at ourselves and ask God for direction and growth is to ask ourselves a second set of questions. To ask ourselves these questions is to ask God to enter into our ministry in a way that assures that we will be both vulnerable and renewed in the midst of the struggles. This second set of questions that accompanies looking though the other side of the window could include as examples, "God, I am in such struggle over this young staff member. He seems to make me so angry when he does the same thing that others his age do. Why can I not get my irritation under control?" Or, "God, this volunteer zinged me again in the site committee meeting, and now I doubt my effectiveness as a leader and administrator. How can this one person have the ability to make me feel like such a failure?" Or, "God, my office manager is so good at what she does, but everyone seems to like her so much better than me. Why is it that I feel so bad in the face of her succeeding in her ministry to children and retreat groups? I should be rejoicing, but seem to only feel jealousy."

So, let's assume that we have looked though one side of the window and asked ourselves — and colleagues and friends — how to change the behavior of a particular employee, and we have gone for a gaze through the other side of the window. We have asked the questions of where we find our thoughts and feelings and connection to God blocked by a particular person or situation in our ministry. Then we ask for guidance from God and others who understand us and our ministry and the commitment we have to it.

A few questions that we can ask ourselves might be, "Whom does this person remind me of in my past?" "Why is it that I keep ending up in or with this particular situation/understanding/employee who drives me crazy/makes me mad/ makes me feel like a failure, etc.?" "Why am I so unable to hold this particular person accountable?" "I keep hearing people tell me that I act a certain way, but I don't agree with them. Is there something that God is trying to tell me here?"

### **God's Teaching Moment**

One of the basic tenets of codependency and twelve-step programs is that God will continue to send us teachers to help us learn those lessons God has for us, and these teachers will often appear in the form of people whom we really cannot stand. Anyone who has ever worked with youth knows that there will be in any group a child or youth with whom we do not click or who pushes our buttons in some uncomfortable way. It usually means that child or youth reminds us of something in ourselves that we either do not like or would rather forget.

In the same way, God offers us the chance to learn from, grow with, and love those people in our ministry who make us uncomfortable. As we know with campers whom we have sent home for out-of-bounds behavior, loving and learning from as well as holding accountable are not in any way mutually exclusive. They can all happen in the same incident and with the same person (child or staff) — often breaking our hearts in the midst of it all. Any situation with someone whom we supervise or who supervises us that feels or makes us think of

ourselves differently is an opportunity for growth.

In addition, if we as a woman or a person of a minority status feels or believes that we are being misjudged because of that status, the need to look through both sides of the window is even more important. The same is true when we as people of privilege supervise those of a minority status. The other side of the window has much to teach us if we take the time and energy and risk to go take a look. A few questions for the gaze through the other side might be: How am I being misjudged or mistreated because of my status? In the midst of this unfair treatment, what does God want me to learn and what actions should I take? This double question means that we are able to be both aware of the reality of an unjust society while also being empowered in the midst of it. To ask God to show me my sin of racism or sexism or prejudice is a way to be spiritually open to the movement for justice in the world and my own spiritual life.

Asking these questions in our time away from our jobs in intentional prayer and meditation allows us to move from a place of frustration, anger, and possible burn-out into a place of being aware of the healing presence of God in ourselves and those in our place of ministry. The final question in this reflection on spiritual practice is this: "What is the alternative to this way of being open to and vulnerable with God and our neighbor?" To not ask these questions is to be continually presented with those "teachers" whom we would really rather avoid! It could also mean a less-than-effective ministry with people who look to us for guidance and direction. It could also mean a spiritual life that becomes stagnant and disconnected from the reality of the moment and the flowing nature of God's grace in our personal lives and the life of our ministries.

Take the time to seek out the view from the other side of the window. It may be that you have been missing much of the abundant life that God is only waiting to surprise you with!

*Melinda Trotti is the Interim Director of the Life Enrichment Center in Fruitland Park, FL*

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