

Second Edition, Revised and Expanded

STEWARDSHIP



Choosing
Service
Over
Self-Interest



PETER BLOCK

Bestselling author of *Community* and *Flawless Consulting*

Servant Leadership Online Training Summit March 24 - April 2, 2020

More praise for the new edition of *Stewardship*

“Be forewarned: this is a scary read. In the twenty years I have been engaged in collaborative leadership programs, Peter has been a go-to author for challenging the theory and practice of leadership. In this second edition of *Stewardship*, Peter leaves us nowhere to hide as he takes an in-depth look at what it truly means to lead from the heart in a culture driven by accountability, metrics, and control. Every ‘yes but’ I raised is countered with examples, metaphors, skillful explanation, case studies, quotes, practical suggestions, and Peter’s trademark creativity and faith in our ability to do the right thing for the common good.”

—Anne J. Udall, Trustee, American Leadership Forum (ALF); former Director, Charlotte Region Chapter, ALF; and Vice Chair, Udall Foundation

“Like Robert Greenleaf before him, Peter Block’s voice is that of a contemporary prophet. This revised edition of *Stewardship* is one of the best books ever written. It serves as a powerful source of hope and encouragement for servant-leaders everywhere.”

—Larry C. Spears, coauthor of *Insights on Leadership*, *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership*, and *Fortuitous Encounters*

“Over the past forty years, through *Stewardship* and other seminal works, Peter Block has articulated the course required for effective leadership in the 21st century. If only more managers and leaders from every sector took note and practiced the principles of *stewardship*—productivity would rise, people would be healthier, local community life would be flourishing, and the spirit of democracy would be enlivened worldwide. His message is that essential and that scalable.”

—Lynn Luckow, President and CEO, LikeMinded.org, and former President and CEO, Craigslist Foundation

“*Stewardship* is love in action. It is time for our organizations to rethink how they exercise power and control. In our changing country and world, our capacity for stewardship may be what ultimately saves our democracy and models accountability and freedom, in their real sense, for the rest of the world. As usual, Peter Block points us in the direction of our better selves, living out a better future.”

—Sayra Pinto, Principal, Matriz Coaching & Consulting

“This is one of those very rare anomalies: a second edition that is more essential and timely than the first. It spotlights our current dysfunctionalities—such as the literal looting of so many of our organizations by self-serving top levels—and how far we have actually regressed from a pattern of commitment to service and healthy work environments in most corporations. It’s impossible to read this book and then continue to look at current organizational processes as (desirable) ‘business as usual.’”

—Fritz Steele, organizational and environmental consultant and coauthor of *The Arrogant Leader*

“As with his other books, the second edition of *Stewardship* forces the reader to rethink basic assumptions about leadership and change in organizations. Peter always challenges my thinking and offers a perspective that I have never found elsewhere. He makes espoused values come alive. Leading in the way Peter describes requires courage, a virtue missing in many of today’s organization leaders. Peter’s unique ability to pinpoint the true source of power and confront the reader in a way that cuts through defenses makes reading *Stewardship* a true learning and growth experience.”

—Cliff Bolster, Leadership and Learning Consultant, Bolster & Associates, Inc.

“Peter Block is one of the most provocative and iconoclastic thinkers we have on the topics of leadership, business, and organizational design. His insights are still fresh and razor sharp, and he expresses them in a singular, poetic style. The new edition of this foundational text extends the scope of his insights to meet the challenges that have arisen in the last twenty years and shows how to create not just productive and humane workplaces but vibrant communities, an engaged democracy, and a healthy planet.”

—Toni A. Gregory, EdD, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, PhD Program in Interdisciplinary Studies, Union Institute & University

“Peter Block’s second edition of *Stewardship* is even more provocative than the first edition was twenty years ago because we are more fearful about our economic and personal well-being than ever before. Block helps us see our own complicity and interconnectedness with all that goes on around us and, with this updated edition, will help a new generation learn that the way to find meaning and purpose in life is to form partnerships for the common good, empower each other through human understanding, and together, build competent societies.”

—Frances Strickland, PhD, President, Smith Educational Enterprises

STEWARDSHIP

Also by Peter Block

*The Abundant Community:
Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods,*
co-authored with John McKnight

*Flawless Consulting:
A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used,*
Third edition

Community: The Structure of Belonging

*The Answer to How Is Yes:
Acting on What Matters*

*The Flawless Consulting Fieldbook and Companion:
A Guide to Understanding Your Expertise*

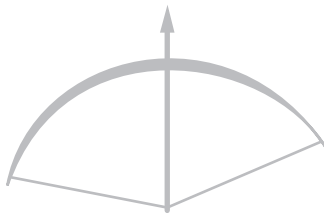
*Freedom and Accountability at Work:
Applying Philosophic Principles to the Real World,*
coauthored with Peter Koestenbaum

*The Empowered Manager:
Positive Political Skills at Work*

STEWARDSHIP

Choosing Service Over Self-Interest

Second Edition



Peter Block



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a BK Business book

Servant Leadership Online Training Summit March 24 - April 2, 2020

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To Leyland, Gracie, and Auggie, my grandchildren.

*Each a uniquely beautiful soul.
Knowing them assures me that they will create
a better world than the one they inherited.*

and

To Leslie Stephen, my always editor and friend.

*She is a dream to work with: honors my voice,
holds to the intent, performs alchemy with words.
After her touch, the writing is clearer and
kinder to the reader and to me.
This revision does not exist without her.*

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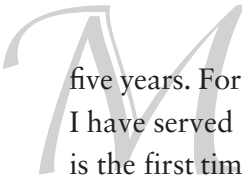
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Foreword

by Steven Piersanti

 MY PUBLISHING CAREER has spanned more than thirty-five years. For thirty of those years I have been an acquiring editor, and I have served as the lead editor for many hundreds of books. Yet this is the first time I have ever written the foreword for a book.

Why have I chosen to do something for this book that I have never done before? Two reasons. First, as a testament to the importance of this book. And second, because of gratitude for the profound impact of this book on Berrett-Koehler Publishers and on me personally.

Stewardship was published to great acclaim in 1993, and it quickly became a best seller, eventually selling nearly 200,000 copies. *Library Journal* (June 15, 1993, p. 92) said that “Block transcends all extant leadership literature” and this book “[has] conceived the organizational structure of the 21st century.” *Stewardship* inspired thousands of leaders and change agents to profoundly rethink how they did their daily work. For example, one educational administrator wrote (in a letter to Peter Block), “I will never look at leadership and organizations the same way again . . . I have read the book, reread it, highlighted it, read my highlights, and taken notes on my highlights.” Hundreds of other book authors and change agents were so influenced by *Stewardship* that they incorporated ideas from it in their work, thereby

further spreading its influence. Some of them wrote their own books (such as *Abolishing Performance Appraisals* and *The Future of Staff Groups*) that delved deeper into particular themes of *Stewardship*. And Peter Block expanded the last chapter of *Stewardship* into an equally profound book, *The Answer to How Is Yes*.

Block has added fascinating and important new material in this second edition: a new introduction that surveys, with Block's compelling insight and mind-opening perspective, what has changed and what has not changed in the world in the past twenty years—and how the ideas in this book are needed now more than ever; a new chapter on “stewardship for the common good” that shows how the principles in the book apply not just to individuals and organizations but also to communities and to society in general; and new examples of stewardship in action.

But this new material is just icing on the cake. What I especially love about *Stewardship* is that it is the rare book that is just as relevant *and* radical today as it was the day it was written, or even more so. This is a sign that Peter Block hit bedrock with the concepts in this book.

One can open the book almost anywhere and find pithy, memorable observations that turn conventional thinking on its head and open our minds to new ways of seeing the world around us. Consider, for example, this comment in chapter 12, “Cosmetic Reform: When the Disease Becomes the Cure”: “Appraisal is a process of coercion. We also call it a reward system. Yet if it is a reward system, it is a punishment system too.”

Block provides such a foundational and far-reaching rethinking of leadership, power, purpose, governance, and participation in organizations and communities that the ideas of this book will continue to change our thinking for decades to come. The book's original and central concepts—stewardship, partnership, service, avoiding class systems, and many others—are so profound and universally relevant that they will challenge readers' beliefs and practices in any place and time, now and in the future.

Berrett-Koehler is unusual as a publishing company because we consciously and actively seek to learn from the books we publish and to use the ideas in those books to improve how we run our business, serve our customers, partner with authors, and work with all of our stakeholders. Without any doubt, *Stewardship* has had more impact on Berrett-Koehler than any other of the more than five hundred books we have published.

For twenty years I have given each new BK employee a copy of *Stewardship* and asked her or him to read it. But that is only the tip of the iceberg of this book's influence on our company.

Its influence started in 1992, even before *Stewardship* was published, when I was working with Peter Block on the manuscript and sought to incorporate its ideas into how Berrett-Koehler was conceived and organized. In fact, the founding concept of Berrett-Koehler was based on stewardship, as described in our first catalog in the spring of 1992:

If I were to choose one word to describe our vision, it would be "stewardship." By this I mean a deep sense of responsibility to administer the publishing company for the benefit of all of our "stakeholder" groups—authors, customers, employees, suppliers and subcontractors, owners, and the societal and environmental communities in which we live and work. Each of these groups contributes to the success of our publishing venture, and each has a "stake" or investment in its success, whether that investment is time, talent, money, or other resources.

This is still our guiding concept today for all that we do at Berrett-Koehler.

There is a story behind why the ideas of *Stewardship* fell on such fertile ground at Berrett-Koehler. Before founding BK, I had been president of Jossey-Bass Publishers in San Francisco during its challenging transition from being an independent company to becoming part of the media empire of Robert Maxwell (who at the time was a chief

rival of Rupert Murdoch) and being placed as a division of Maxwell Communications Corporation.

I quickly discovered that our new corporate parent was calling all the shots, and none of the other Jossey-Bass stakeholders really mattered. Not the many Jossey-Bass employees who had been central to the company's success for ten to twenty years of faithful employment there; not the authors with whom Jossey-Bass had longstanding relationships, some of whom were original authors of the company; not the many suppliers and service providers on whom the company depended, including some who had supported the company from its founding. All that really mattered was the call from my boss in New York City—a bureaucrat who seemed to have no real understanding of our company or even how to work collaboratively and intelligently with us.

What was especially troubling about this new balance of power was that there was nothing our new corporate parent was doing that made Jossey-Bass more successful or productive or profitable. Yet, without adding any value, the corporate parent presumed to unilaterally govern our company. It was easy to see that something was deeply wrong with this equation.

And so the ideas in the *Stewardship* manuscript spoke directly to my corporate experience. We set out to build Berrett-Koehler Publishers on a different foundation. This started with the founding concept quoted above and was later reinforced by our articulation of our mission as “Creating a World That Works for All.” It has continued with a host of BK practices directly inspired by the concepts in *Stewardship*.

One of these core practices is to avoid a class system in our management, employment, and compensation practices. This begins with involving all employees (and, when appropriate, other stakeholders) in making major company decisions. And whereas, as Block writes in *Stewardship*, most organizations have two compensation systems, with the executive compensation system designed to pay those at the top as much as possible and the employee compensation system designed to control costs, Berrett-Koehler has just one compensation system for everyone in the company. Furthermore, this compensation system is

designed to pay a living wage to everyone and to minimize the disparity between the lowest and highest paid employees; accordingly, the highest paid employee (me) earns less than five times what the lowest paid full-time employee earns, including bonuses. All employees are involved in decisions about changes in the compensation system. And we have taken another page out of *Stewardship* by banishing secrecy: all employees know where every employee is on the compensation scale, and all employees receive full financial reports each month of how the company is doing and where money is being spent.

Another area where Berrett-Koehler has sought to live by the ideas in *Stewardship* is by following a partnership approach in our relationships with authors. This approach struck pay dirt right from the beginning of our company with our distinctive publication agreement, which, in the words of one early observer, “creates incentives for both parties to contribute and do well, whereas most contracts are contingencies for when things go wrong, legal protection against foul-ups.” The publication agreement gives authors more involvement in deciding the title, cover design, and interior design of the book than is normally the case in the publishing world. Various other clauses in the agreement also support a partnering relationship with authors in lieu of the publisher control clauses in most agreements. And most radical of all, the agreement yields to authors the ultimate power by giving them the right to terminate the agreement “if, for any reason, the Author is not satisfied in the Author’s sole judgment, with any aspect of the relationship with the Publisher or with the Publisher’s performance in any aspect of publishing and selling the Work.” This turns on its head the normal hierarchy between publishers and authors.

We have developed many other practices over the years to support a partnering relationship with authors, including launching each new book with an “Author Day” that allows authors to interact with our entire staff and to work directly with our editorial, design and production, sales and marketing, and digital community building teams; supporting the growth of the “BK Authors Cooperative,” which is an independent organization through which BK authors help each other

in numerous ways to increase their success and impact; and creating a groundbreaking “Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for BK Authors.” These partnering practices and many others are major contributors to Berrett-Koehler’s success and are why many view BK as one of the most author-friendly publishers.

We approach relationships with other stakeholder groups with a similar partnering approach. This starts with the ownership of our company by our employees, authors, customers, suppliers, service providers, sales partners, and other stakeholders. All these groups are included in our strategic planning processes and our occasional “BK Community Dialogues.” And our board of directors includes representatives of all these groups. This has led to great support for Berrett-Koehler by our stakeholders throughout our company’s history, including during challenging economic times.

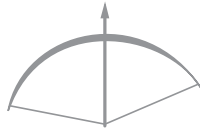
So we at Berrett-Koehler know from abundant firsthand experience that the ideas in *Stewardship* are powerful and effective in creating meaning, contribution, and success for an organization or community.

It is my hope that every leader, every aspiring leader, every change agent in any group, and every member of the BK community will read this book. I know that all who do so and who seek to incorporate these concepts in their life and work will be richly blessed and increase their capacity to do good in the world.

Steven Piersanti

President, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Welcome



OUR TASK IS TO create organizations that work, especially in a world where everything constantly seems up in the air. We know that fundamental change is required. We keep talking about cultural change, but this will not be enough if we stay focused on changing attitudes and skills. No question that beliefs and attitudes need to change, but unless there is also a shift in governance—namely, how we distribute power and privilege and the control of money—the efforts will be more cosmetic than enduring.

The need for something different partly grows out of us as individuals. There resides in each of us the desire to more fully integrate our lives. We must feel fragmented, because we talk about ourselves as if we were cats with several lives. “This is my work life,” “This is my personal life,” “This is my spiritual life.” In compartmentalizing our lives, we are constantly setting aside parts of ourselves, even at times giving ourselves away. This fragmentation is also reflected in our organizations. There are all the debates between being people oriented and task oriented, hard-nosed and soft-nosed, values driven and results driven.

The central idea of this book, stewardship, has the potential for us to reintegrate parts of ourselves and move beyond the debates in our organizations. In this way, it is a book of reconciliation. Stewardship focuses our attention on aspects of our workplaces that have been most

difficult to change: the distribution of power, purpose, and rewards. It is these dimensions of organizations that need to be re-formed if we are to become whole in our efforts to strengthen ourselves. We are each engaged in discrete exercises to help our organizations lose weight, become more flexible, and stay hopeful. We have a program for everything. Cost reduction, continuous improvement, customer service, cycle time, empowerment. Each one seems to meet its goals, yet a major part of our lives stays unchanged. We remain watchful of people who have power over us; we feel that the organization is the creation of someone other than ourselves and that the changes we want to make still need sponsorship and permission from others at a higher level.

We need a way of reconciling the promise of our programs with the experience of our day-to-day lives so that the *Queen Mary* truly changes direction.



Stewardship

Stewardship is the umbrella idea that promises the means of achieving fundamental change in the way we govern our institutions. Stewardship is to hold something in trust for another. Historically, stewardship was a means to protect a kingdom while those rightfully in charge were away, or, more often, to govern for the sake of an underage king. The underage king for us is the next generation. We choose service over self-interest most powerfully when we build the capacity of the next generation to govern themselves.

Stewardship is defined in this book as the choice to preside over the orderly distribution of power. This means giving people at the bottom and the boundaries of the organization choice over how to serve a customer, a citizen, a community. It is the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control, of those around us. Stated simply, it is accountability without control or compliance.



Service

The underlying value is about deepening our commitment to service. We have the language of service. We serve our country; we call ourselves a service economy; we choose public service as a profession; we have committed to serve customers. What is missing is the experience of service. Our experience is too often to find ourselves surrounded by self-interest, especially inside our institutions. The ways we govern, manage, and lead are a testimony to self-interest. Authentic service is experienced when these conditions exist:

- There is a balance of power. People need to act on their own choices. Acts of compliance do not serve those around us or the larger organization. Dominance also fails. We do a disservice to others when we make decisions for them. Even if we are right.
- The primary commitment is to the larger community. Focusing constant attention on the individual or a small team breeds self-centeredness and entitlement.
- Each person joins in defining purpose and deciding what kind of culture this organization will become. We diminish others when we define purpose and meaning for them, even if they ask us to do so.
- There is a balanced and equitable distribution of rewards. Every level of an organization shares in creating its wealth and expanding its resources. When an organization succeeds in its marketplace, money and privilege need to be more evenly distributed among levels if our commitment to service is to have any integrity.

Without these elements, no genuine service is performed.

These notions of service and stewardship, however, are not the basis of how we currently run our organizations. They do reflect some of our intentions about how to govern, but not the reality.

Some of the elements are often in place. We frequently see innovative pay systems, self-managing teams, total quality efforts, partnerships, customer attentiveness, and inverted pyramids. They are rarely, however, put together in a pervasive governance strategy. As a result, we end up too often working against ourselves. We share control with the left hand and take it back with the right. One moment we are on the fast track toward participation, and the next moment we are instituting more controls. The new technology makes it even easier to control workers. We can electronically track their movements, their work patterns, who they are communicating with, how much they are working even when they are out of sight. Supervision has almost turned into surveillance.

The intent of this book is to translate these ideas about power, community, purpose, and privilege into a whole strategy for governing our companies and institutions. Stewardship then becomes a governance strategy. It is the search for the means of experiencing partnership and empowerment and service. This book offers a guide map for this search. Discovering how to govern, to ensure the well-being and survival of our organizations, is how we create meaning in what we do. This is the spiritual stream we stand in.

Stewardship encompasses concerns of the spirit, but it also must pass the test of the marketplace. It must be practical and economical. It must be low cost and good for customers and communities as well as employees. Our organizations constantly stand on this intersection of spirit, community, and the marketplace. The unique intention of this book is to offer the means by which there can be a reconciliation of what is good for the soul, good for a customer, and good for the health of the larger institution.

This book, then, is for those of us living questions of purpose and survival. It is not written from the point of view of consultants, experts in managing change, and experienced practitioners worried about changing others. The book takes the viewpoint of core workers, staff people, supervisors, managers, and executives. It is for frontline

workers and people in a support role. People who are in the middle of it all. It is for activists in school reform, health care, and government under fire, as well as businesses in the private sector. It is for people who have decided that their organization needs reforming and have doubts about whether what they are doing now is enough.

This book has three parts plus a new introduction, which presents the current backdrop for the issues the book deals with. Part I, “Trading Your Kingdom for a Horse,” is about the basic concept and the promise of stewardship and the limitations of leadership. It dramatizes the choices we face and the high wire we dance upon. Part II, “The Redistribution of Power, Purpose, and Wealth,” gets practical. It is for the engineer in each of us that asks at some point in every conversation, “Enough theory—what does it look like? What do we do differently tomorrow, first thing, at 7 a.m.?” I don’t know why the engineer in us gets up so early. In this second part resides the vision of stewardship in action. Special attention is given to staff groups like finance and human resources. Part III, “The Triumph of Hope Over Experience,” goes into some of the details about how to get there. What is a logical sequence for thinking about the reform process? It is about how to handle cynics and victims and people who do not want to take the trip. It often does not matter what the trip is; there are just some people who do not want to take it.

The idea of communal stewardship can also be applied to larger community concerns about the social responsibility of institutions. This is explored in chapter 16, “Stewardship for the Common Good.” There are growing questions in society about the relationship between our institutions and the environment, the disparity in wealth, our health, and other social concerns that once were questions on the margin but now may have to do with our collective survival and well-being.

A comment about the book’s design: Accompanying the main text are inserts of anecdotes, quotes, and key sentences from the text itself. Taken together, these are intended as a book within a book. If the main text gets slow, you always have the inserts and quotes to chew on.

This treatment is also a way of balancing the rhythm of the text with voices more profound than mine. And you will notice key words or phrases set off on certain pages. This is to visually open up the book and also to let you know where you are; if you should want to return to a particular spot, they are there to help you find your way back.

At the end of the book are references to books and other works that support the ideas presented here. I also want to acknowledge the important contribution to this book of Joel Henning. His fingerprints are everywhere. We were committed and cranky friends, thought partners, coconspirators, and fools together during the time when the ideas were taking shape. He wrote the original foreword to the book, which I have removed, as the times have changed. Joel always found the language to get to the heart of the matter and the courage to lean into any kind of breeze. He is over ten years gone now, but his work and humanity live on in all he touched.

Many hands touching the production of a book make a bigger difference than might be immediately obvious. I appreciate Steve Pier-santi for the encouragement of this edition and the Berrett-Koehler staff that brought the book into being. The copyediting was done by Elissa Rabellino. I am so grateful for the way she honored my voice and non-*Chicago* style of writing. She suffered too many sentence fragments and yet in every instance stood firmly for the readability and clarity of the ideas. It is just a better book because she touched it.

Same with Leigh McLellan, who designed the interior of this edition. She has a wonderful and delicate eye for design and keeping the pages open and welcoming, with enough visual energy to encourage the reader to hang in there when the writing doesn't do its job. For me, the look of the book is as important as its content, and much thanks to Leigh for creating a sense of wholeness out of all the type, spacing, and ornaments.

Finally, a word about the painting that graces the cover. It is a painting of an archer by John Nieto, a well-known contemporary American artist. The painting speaks to the best intentions of this book. The

archer's feet are so planted as to be almost a part of the ground. Practical and connected to reality. The bow and the arrow are aimed at the heavens. The arrow carries within it clear intentions; the sky is a place of infinite view and vision. The colors of deep purple and fierce yellow offer a hint of what is unknown; they speak to adventure. These are at the heart of the offering that is this book.

All of the above by way of welcome.

Cincinnati

November 2012

Upsetting Expectations

The Emotional Work of Stewardship

AT THE SAME time that we contemplate our strategy and chart our next steps, our thoughts are also on how to deal with the people around us to build support for our intentions and the process we have in mind. This is the beginning of the journey toward stewardship. The starting point, as with all change, is to get clear within ourselves. We need to be sure that we are personally choosing stewardship and not acting out of obligation or a desire to please.

IT IS HARD to know at times whether we have chosen or borrowed the words we use and the path we pursue. We can assure ourselves that the choice is real when the following is true:

- We have found a good business or organizational reason for proceeding. This includes identifying the difficult issues facing our unit.
- We can clearly define our customers and can identify the unique value we bring them.
- We can be specific about the results we need to stay healthy and meet our obligations to those who finance us.

- We have named, in our own words, the principles we commit to, which will guide any change.

These actions have us define a stewardship contract with ourselves. So, with this contract as the context and a reassurance against our concerns about anarchy and chaos, we are ready to learn the meaning of surrender.

The word *surrender* is often thought to have only one meaning: to lose and be defeated. There is also a spiritual meaning to the word. To surrender is to accept that there is a waxing and waning rhythm to events and to trust that good things can happen without our needing to control them. Acceptance is to simply see what is real without having to color it, or fix it, or soften it.

It takes a certain kind of faith in ourselves and others not to make control the centerpiece of our transaction with the world. We have come to believe that control is essential to our survival and safety, and even our success. Everything around us reinforces this belief, as this book has tried to document. Stewardship is the choice to unravel this connection between control, safety, and success. The radical intent of stewardship is to be of service and to be accountable without having to be in charge. Unraveling control, safety, and success is essential to discovering what is possible for us and our workplace. It is not easy for those of us who have chosen safety all our lives to be shoved into such an adventure.



The Trail Is Inside Out

In any reform effort, the hardest change is the inside work, the emotional work. Creating partnership in a work setting is a shift in beliefs and a personal shift in the way we make contact with those in power. And with those we have power over. These are issues for the artist in us to revisit. Our first instinct is to want to engineer change. To focus on what is outside of us.

It is easiest to change those things that are easiest to talk about. So we focus on structure, roles, responsibilities. We have intense discussions about innovative pay systems, self-management strategies, and the elements of innovation management. Discussion of what is concrete and visible and measurable is the engineer in us at work. The engineering work of reform is the actual redesign effort. It is essential, but it is not enough. Something more is required. There is artwork to be done, internal seeing and reevaluation of our own wants, longings, and expectations. If there is no transformation inside each of us, all the structural change in the world will have no impact on our institutions. The moment we think we get the point and others don't, it is back to square one.



Facing the Wish for Dependency and Dominance

The heart of the internal work is to sort through our way of relating to those people who have some power over us and those people whom we have power over. Stated more simply, we must discover how to resolve our wishes for dependency and for dominance.

Dependency is the belief that my safety, my self-esteem, and my freedom are in the hands of other people. If we are children, safety, self-esteem, and freedom are realistically under our parents' control. When we reach the age of consent, responsibility for our well-being shifts into our own hands. This assumption of responsibility is ritualized by society in giving us the right to vote, the right to defend our country, the right to enter into legal contracts. On our eighteenth birthday, we become adults, and placing our safety, our self-esteem, and our freedom into the hands of others is no longer required or functional. Adults place their autonomy in the hands of others by choice.

The Wish for Dependency

As a child, as a student, or as a partner in a relationship, most of us at some point have given away to another the power to determine how

valued we are, how happy we can be, and how much freedom we can have. When we go to work, no matter how tough we think we have become, we look to our bosses and others above us and hand to them the power to determine, once again, how valued we are, how secure we can be, how much freedom we have. It is this willingness to place our survival in others' hands that fuels the engine of patriarchy. We do it without others' having to ask. Our bosses do not wake up in the morning and decide to create doubt in our minds and rein us back under control. They come to work, see the longing in our eyes, and

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There was this recurring sense that I could decide all that morality stuff later, that the expediency of making sure everyone liked me would carry me through until I was old enough to determine a moral course. I allowed the merchants free reign of the temples, never realizing how at home they had become.

—Donna Schaper, *A Book of Common Power*

try to be the kind of boss we have been waiting for. This wish to be taken care of, including the desire to be led, is a form of our own self-centeredness. Our own choice for self-interest over service.

If we can see clearly how the wish for dependency works within ourselves, we can then begin to see how it works in others. If we focus only on helping other people work through their desire to be taken care of, then we are engag-

ing in simply a more subtle form of patriarchy: we have the answer and others are going to get that answer and we are going to call it help.

Experiencing the depth of our own longing for others to provide us safety and freedom is the absolute first step in creating organizations that are based on partnership, empowerment, and responsibility. The wish for safety surfaces in our expectations and disappointments in people who have some power over us. Since we all have someone above us, we all are looking for predictability. Someone to take uncertainty out of the future.

Our willingness to reevaluate our expectations creates an opening to move toward stewardship. Renegotiating this internal transaction, beginning with our own needs of those above us, is the artwork, the emotional work of stewardship. We cannot create partnership or foster

empowerment within our own unit if we continue to relate to those above us as parents. Until we take back control from those above, we will not be able to extend it to those below.

The Wish for Dominance

The coin of dependency has an opposite side, and that is the wish for dominance. Dominance fulfills the wish to be in control. It may take on the softer guise of being the all-knowing, omniscient, loving parent. Or you may see it as being part of a strong leader, giving people structure, clarity, and something to lean on and react to. These are all indirect forms of staying on top.

A regional sales manager for a pharmaceutical company stated after the second day of an empowerment workshop, “I spent a lot of money to come to a workshop to learn something that I have been doing all along. I have always done what I want. I have always acted autonomously.” We should have given him half his money back, because he got only half the point. He had claimed his freedom but had not yet begun to offer it to those around him. The desire to be on top, to be right, to be invulnerable, to know what is best for other people—all are qualities of great parents and fertile territory to be explored. Unexamined dominance creates cosmetic empowerment and feeds continued patriarchy.

Dominance may take the form of seeing the world as a battleground, wanting to win, to be associated with winners, hard-nosed, bottom line, number one, best-in-class. We hear the wish for dominance come out in our language. “We want to surround the competition.” “We take no prisoners.” “We are engaged in an economic war.” “Failure is not an option.” This kind of guy-talk is the voice and lyrics of patriarchy. We create a battle code to explain and sustain our aggression. The kind of competitive spirit that keeps the world going round, and makes racquetball and poker such fine games, expresses the part of us that wants control, loyalty, and gratitude.

Unfortunately, many of us are too sophisticated to come right out and say we want to control our people. We are schooled in the language of equality. We call employees “associates,” “colleagues,” or “people who work with us, not for us.” One candy company calls employees “associates,” then requires everyone to punch a time clock twice a day. No punch, 10 percent of your pay is withheld. Using soft language means we have simply found indirect ways to act on our desire for control. Our own wish for control, regardless of how it is expressed, has to be owned before we are ready to be serious about stewardship.



Freedom’s Just Another Word for Escape from Freedom

Claiming control over others who are adults is a choice. We may think they are not ready to exercise their freedom, but this is mostly our rationalization. Still, it is frustrating to send an invitation for partnership and discover that there are supervisors and core workers who will not even send their regrets. We have taken a stand for empowerment, offered others their freedom, and yet they seem to sit in the cage with the door wide open. It can be disheartening.

It seems that a certain percentage of people just do not want to claim their autonomy. The percentage varies with each of us. Some of us think 10 to 20 percent just want things the way they have always

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**So long as man remains free, he strives
for nothing so incessantly and so pain-
fully as to find someone to worship.**

—Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

been; others think as many as 60 to 70 percent still want good parents for their leaders. The reality is that each one of us has deep ambivalence about how much freedom we want to claim for ourselves and how much control over others we

want to surrender. If you think you have completely resolved these questions, you haven’t looked deeply enough. Maya Angelou once said that she is always struck when someone claims they are a Christian; her response invariably is “So soon?”

Identifying our own wishes for dependency and dominance is just the beginning. The overarching intent of the discussion here is to offer a way of minimizing their interference. This brings us back to the idea of surrender. We need a deeper way of understanding our emotional investment in the patriarchal contract. If we stop at the level of stating that some people want their freedom and some people don't, or that some managers are willing to give up control and some are not, then we end up searching for "the right people" and becoming increasingly discouraged. The task is to renegotiate our contracts with those around us, shifting them from parenting to partnership agreements. The way into the center of renegotiating contracts is to accept the dominance and dependency that live deep within ourselves and others.

There are not dependent people and dominant people. There are not autonomous people and participative people. This is the viewpoint of the psychologist, who then wants to create a questionnaire to identify empowered employees and empowering managers and use the results to select and develop the right people. Viewing the solution as a talent search so externalizes the problem that we stay immobile, stuck on that wooden horse where we began.

Instead, hold on to the idea that each of us has dependent and autonomous parts. We also have dominant and yielding parts. Accepting this thought does two things. First, it places the problem within our control rather than projecting it onto others. To speak as if we are empowered and those people are not, as if we have claimed our freedom and they have not, is just a subtle form of some Darwinian wish to be further along than others. By acknowledging that the struggle is ours, we keep ourselves humble and focused on the right spot. Second, it means there is hope for those who seem to resist the ideas of partnership and empowerment and the responsibility that goes along with them. If there is in each person a wish for more autonomy and a wish to give up control, then it gives us something in each person to speak to.



Unstated Emotional Wants

Breaking the Pattern

Dependency and dominance get lived out through the mechanism of unstated emotional wants. Parenting and patriarchy endure through the unstated and irrational expectations we have that those around us will provide safety, freedom, and self-esteem. The expectations we have of dominance are that we are entitled to compliance, loyalty, and gratitude. These expectations, called *unstated emotional wants* here, are traditionally evoked and agreed to each time we join an institution. It doesn't matter whether the institution is our family, school, work, or church. The institution wants compliance and loyalty, and in return we want it to provide us with safety and self-esteem. It is our wish for

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It is hard to know who is the greater fool, the one who makes a promise of safety or the one who believes it.

safety that leads to our willingness to yield sovereignty. It is the institution's belief that it needs loyalty (the nobler word for compliance) that leads it to make the promise of safety and protection.

Successfully renegotiating these expectations is the early emotional work of political reform. The renegotiation begins when we acknowledge and accept the power of these unstated emotional wants. Once we accept them, we can stop being controlled by them.

Doing Something about the Wants

We can use exaggeration to see even more clearly the part of us that wants others to provide us our safety, self-esteem, and freedom. Exaggeration is the antidote to our tendency to deny our more uncomfortable desires.

When people are asked to state their normally unstated wants from those around them, and to exaggerate, here is what they/we long for.

Expectations of a Relationship

Place my needs above all others.
Provide me with safety at all times.
Include me in all decisions.
Never argue with me.
Want to be with me always.
Take care of me so that I don't have to be responsible for myself.
Trust and agree with all my decisions.
Give me my freedom... all the space I need.
Never need anything I don't want to give.

Which Get Expressed in Expectations of a Boss

I want to be your favorite.
Ask my advice before you do anything that affects me or my work.
Make me your confidant
Make my advancement your personal responsibility.
See my weaknesses as charming.
Leave me alone except when I am in trouble—then rescue me.
Protect me from powerful foes; run interference for me.

On the flip side, as bosses, we have our own emotional demands of employees. The ones who meet these expectations affirm to us that we are good at what we do, and we tend to call them high performers.

A Boss's Reciprocal Expectations of an Employee

Value me more than any boss you have ever had.
Know what I need and want without my having to ask.
Accept my controlling behavior as timely and helpful.

Don't bother me with problems.

Come to me only with solutions and successes.

Even though I occasionally embarrass you in front of peers,
consider me your friend.

Be loyal to me, regardless of how I operate.

Be grateful for the opportunity to work for me and learn
from me.

Finally, those in service/staff roles have their own desires of their
“clients.”

Service/Staff Person's Expectations of a Client

Don't act without asking my advice. Tell me you have learned
more from me than from anyone else.

Tell others how good I am, especially up the line.

Keep needing me; don't get too independent.

Teach me what I need to know, and be grateful for the
opportunity.

Accept my desire to control you as an act of service.

None of us feel all of these, but if we identify with even one, we
have a clearer idea about the way our dependency and dominance
work. These are emotional wants. They are not rational wants. Ra-

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**Emotional wants, however
strongly felt, represent
questions and doubts about
our life that other human
beings cannot fully answer.**

tional wants *can* be fulfilled by others. Emotional
wants, however strongly felt, represent questions
and doubts about our life that other human beings
cannot fully answer. They can try, and even succeed
for a while, but anyone who acts as if they can pro-
vide us safety, self-esteem, and freedom does us a
disservice. We have to provide these things for our-

selves. Above all, we need to accept these wants in ourselves and others
and see them clearly. They are longings that may never fully disappear,
but we do have a choice about how we act on them, and this is the key.

Choosing stewardship is the choice to say no to others' desire for you to claim control and in exchange offer them protection. Choosing stewardship is our choice to be accountable while supporting freedom in ourselves and others. It is a risky choice and comes packaged in more anxiety than we would bargain for. This choice for accountability and freedom is the essence of the entrepreneurial spirit. It forms the basis for creating a culture of ownership. It also is the contract that is essential to a democratic society.



This social contract based on partnership and empowerment is the difficult emotional work of stewardship. It means saying no to others' wishes for protection and relinquishing our claims for control. What is so difficult to see and yet so powerful is that at the moment we look to others to protect and take care of us, we also hand over to them some semblance of sovereignty and control over what we do. This is where bosses get their patriarchal rights. We ask bosses to be our guardians. Guardianship under the law gives you legal rights to make decisions about another's life.

Similarly, when we decide to protect and take care of others who work for us or with us, we are claiming sovereignty, even in our generosity. That is why caretaking of adults is no gift. When we claim sovereignty, we release the other from any requirement of ownership or emotional accountability. If ownership and responsibility are what we want, and also what the business requires, then sovereignty, in the form of caretaking, needs to be extracted from our relationships.



Just Say No

Extracting sovereignty from our relationships often means we start saying no. Saying no to unfulfillable expectations is critical and difficult. If people have specific wishes of us—such as to support their effort, watch them less closely, give them advice—the answer can be yes. To

Saying No

the extent, though, that these specifics are symbolic of their wishes for security, self-esteem, and freedom, the answer must be no. Even though they may experience our response as an act of abandonment or betrayal. They may feel that since we once offered them that protection and self-esteem, how could we now withhold it? The reason we do not offer security, self-esteem, and freedom to others is that it is not ours to give. Theirs to claim, yes. Ours to give, no. The fact that we once made an unfulfillable offer, because we thought we needed their compliance and we thought it was an act of kindness, is no reason to maintain the illusion.

Take a Load off Annie

Moving from parent to partner comes down to a series of conversations. Dialogue is the solution. The conversation is about purpose, ownership, and responsibility. Shifting these concerns from the exclusive province of the management class and distributing them among people doing the core work. We do this for the sake of the institution, not because the load is too heavy. The boss says in effect, “I want you to share in the felt ownership of this franchise. I plan to share with you the power and privilege of ownership, as long as it is used in service of the larger unit. This is the partnership agreement that I want to manage by.” This conversation accompanies the definition of the stewardship contract discussed earlier, which defines the playing field

A classic example of this renegotiation process is from the marketing department of a utility company. The manager, Anne, wanted the department to become more entrepreneurial and take more initiative. The utility was facing increased competition, and marketing was a part of the effort to bring a customer and marketplace focus to a bureaucratic environment. Early in the meeting, the conversation turned to the things Anne and her people wanted from each other to make this change work. The employees wanted assurances that Anne would take care of them. That she would continue to be responsible for their careers, look for their next move, counsel them on what they needed

to do to move up and get ahead. Given the uncertainty the business was facing, they wanted a reaffirmation of a safe harbor.

Anne wanted from them their commitment to the new role in becoming a more aggressive department. She also wanted their loyalty and devotion and for them to take personal responsibility for the goals of the department.

Anne was reluctant to agree to look after them in the way they wished. She said to them, “I am not responsible for your career. I am not busy looking for opportunities for you. These jobs were not created as career opportunities; they were created to drive this business. The best I will offer is to give you absolutely honest information and encourage you in creating your own future.” Renegotiating her contract about purpose and responsibility was under way.

Their response was quick and clear: “If you do not take care of us, we will not give you the loyalty and devotion that you desire.” This becomes a critical moment for Anne and the team. If she gets nervous and starts to bargain for their loyalty and devotion, she has lost it. She needs their commitment to the department and the utility, but she cannot purchase it through the caretaking promise.

Commitment, ownership, and responsibility cannot be bargained for or bought. We cannot create an entrepreneurial future by offering safety. Anne understood this. Her response was, “Even though I want it, and I will miss it, I can get along without your loyalty and devotion. What you need to decide is whether you can commit to what this department needs to accomplish. Also you need to decide if you want to do this, given the uncertainty of the future.”

Anne’s response began a conversation among partners. The employees were not particularly happy about this conversation. Any time we set limits, we pay a price. Entitlement depends on the expectation that others should satisfy our wants for safety, self-esteem, and freedom. When we say no, there is a wave of blame and disappointment we need to ride out in the search for empowerment and partnership. Anne had the courage to place what was vital to her on the table. Placing the unstated emotional wants on the table exposed them; it did not

create them. Expressing our wants gives us choice; denying them forces them to drive us in unseen ways.

Update: Of the eight members of Anne's team, four stayed to fully engage in the redesign effort and three moved on, later joined by one who stayed around thinking about it for a long time before making the move.

Don't Feel Too Guilty

The wish for caretaking that the utility company employees expressed is very human, but it is the antithesis of ownership and responsibility nevertheless. We are each in our own way afraid of the dark. Hidden bargains are destined to disappoint, and when they disappoint, it is so late and the feelings run so deep that they make the relationship difficult to repair. They also make the illegitimacy of our own expectations difficult to own.

There is no easy way out of this. Allowing our dependency to continue is to forsake ourselves. We then have to endure the guilt of an unlived life. Yet claiming our freedom and making choices betrays others' wishes for us. Parents, teachers, bosses, friends, children—all have expectations of us that we do not meet. To claim stewardship, to claim our freedom as an act of service, is a destabilizing act. This unsteadiness is in the nature of renegotiating social contracts, and it is going to happen because the safety-control-compliance compact doesn't work. To paraphrase Marion Woodman, a famous Jungian author, the only question is whether we are going to work it out in this job or the next one, this marriage or the next one.



I Want My Mentor

As people go through the experience of exploring their unstated emotional wants, they begin to realize that, exaggerated as they might seem, those wants represent real desires; they are the way that dependency and dominance get operationalized. Patriarchal contracts, parent-child

contracts, feed on this kind of longing. They become the mechanisms by which we control each other and hold ourselves back from living out our own vision. It is because we want others to provide us safety and self-esteem that we are willing to live out the vision created by others and deny our own. Patriarchy becomes a refuge for our reluctance to choose adventure and pursue our own purpose.

When we give up the search for others to provide us safety and self-esteem, we need to replace it with something. In essence we are redefining our ambition. We are letting go of advancement and pleasing bosses as the measure of our success. The world is also forcing this on us, as organizations are about as flat, outsourced, and automated as they can be. Also, the effort we make with advancement in mind is just not terribly functional. Our career progression is about as much in our own hands as our choice of parents and birth order. What has the potential to replace our desire to move ever upward is our desire to create an organization and culture we can believe in. Our decision to construct a purpose that we have chosen.

When we tell employees we can no longer take care of them and no longer choose to control them, we need something positive to offer. What we offer is real choice in defining and creating an organization that has purpose and meaning for them. This is

the aim of political reform. A partnership in designing a governance system that fosters ownership and responsibility among those doing the core work. The basic exchange is to offer people more choice in return for a promise. Make sure that both a real choice and a real promise are in the equation. The choice is about having control over the way the work gets done and managed. The promise is about results.

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Choice in exchange for a promise. Both important, both offered up front. Stewardship chosen. Democracy rediscovered.

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When we tell employees we can no longer take care of them and no longer choose to control them, we need something positive to offer. What we offer is real choice in defining and creating an organization that has purpose and meaning for them.
