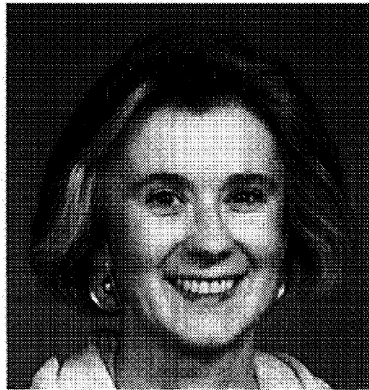


PARTNERSHIP AT WORK

Diana Whitney

Diana Whitney is an international speaker and consultant whose work focuses on introducing appreciative inquiry as an innovative approach to social and organizational change. She is President of Whitney Consulting and a founder of The Taos Institute in Taos, New Mexico.



To talk about business in the 1990s is to talk about relationships—among people, among organizations, among nations, and with the environment. People and their relationships define business, and business defines relational realities and the identities people draw from them. The business of business is people, relationships, and the communication that holds them together.

The idea that work gets done through relationships is hardly new. The old-boy network, smoke-filled back rooms, Robert's Rules of Order, and competition are all forms of relationship that have dominated business life in the past. What is new, however, is the nature and quality of relationship emerging as globalization, equal human rights, and the greening of business become significant bottom-line considerations in board rooms around the world. Forms of organizing based on the values of patriarchy are slowly giving way. The question is, giving way to what? What possibilities exist in our collective, relational repertoire to replace these outmoded yet socially embedded ways? I suggest that *partnership* hold great promise as one way.

FROM PATRIARCHY TO PARTNERSHIP

Patriarchy as a relationship of dominance that give privilege to masculine ways of knowing, to masculine ways of relating and

masculine ways of obtaining results (as well as men over women) prevails throughout the business world today. The relationship among women and men in most of the world is still one of male dominance. Men and women together create and maintain patriarchy as the organizing principle for life and business. As Julie Hawley, partner in The Taos Herb Company states, "In our business women are the most sexist. They will come into the store and ask my male partners questions about women's health issues." Her partner Rob added, "It has to do with the patriarchy of medicine. Our business is health-related so people act like the man knows best. We all have to be very conscious to help our customers get the best information and to learn about their own health. The shift from the patriarchy of medicine to self as healer is a big one for us and for our customers. We constantly refer customers to whoever knows the most, regardless of gender."

Dominance violates the well-being and creative potential of both the dominator and the dominated. Women in business today are tired, not so much from being second-class citizens (which they are), but more so from having to think, talk and act like men to succeed. The price of success for large numbers of women in business is the loss of their feminine ways of knowing, ways of relating and ways of getting things done. The glass ceiling is really quite simple—women are bailing out at high corporate levels because the cost to their souls is too great. One woman I talked with was emphatic when she explained, "I simply must work where my intuition is trusted. I can't be in an environment where I have to prove everything. Most of the time I just know what I know. I can't prove it with statistics or even references to what customers think or want. I just know when things will work and when they won't. I am buying my partners out of one area of our business so I'll be able to trust my intuition and just do it."

Men also suffer from the enactment of patriarchal values. The societal collusion that men are responsible and at the same time unable to make the world a better place is a burden that rests heavily on the shoulders of men around the world. The corporate hierarchy is a steep climb and not many make it to the top; most people feel inadequate. Cynicism and skepticism abound among those who bought into the story and know in their hearts that it is not their story. Few men live with a sense of values congruity. They too sacrifice the values and dreams of their souls to the corporate patriarchy. Freedom to think, day-dream, and imagine—all essential to creativity and to life—are luxuries available to few men in business.

To think that matriarchy would be better than the current masculine-dominated business world is to miss the point. The

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only way we can create a world that honors the essential connectedness and at the same time the uniqueness of all life is to embrace *partnership* as a relational paradigm that honors both the masculine and the feminine.

The transformation in consciousness that is required for the new millennium involves an entirely new way of participating fully in life. It is only the combination of the two forces of the feminine and the masculine, working in harmony as a united 'soft' power, that can bring about radical change. The old model of hard power is about domination and control over others, places, and things; it generates fear and alienation and is often enforced with violence. Soft power comes from within and generates a sense of connection and creativity. It is the power of mutual respect and vision; as such, it is empowering and capable of spontaneous rapid growth and transformative change. —Adele Getty¹

Robert Johnson expresses the imperative for partnership when he says, "Men and women who add the inner feminine energy to patriarchal accomplishment court genius ... As truly modern people, we are at the crest of a wave where the best of both worlds (masculine and feminine) can be achieved if we are wise enough to escape the modern prejudice of one-sidedness."² It is time to seek the middle way, to discover the potential of women and men working together in ways that affirm their differences. It is time to put away androgyny as a model of being, and to wave a banner celebrating differences among women and men and the incredible power of partnership. It is time to build society, business, products, and services to truly meet the needs and agendas of both women and men.

IMAGES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN PARTNERSHIP

In the United States as well as throughout the world, the public images of women and men working or living together in equal partnership are pale when compared to the images of women and men as lone heroic leaders. As a society we know the possibilities of men and even now women as individual heroes—as business leaders, as government leaders, as astronauts, as musicians, artists, priests, and spiritual leaders. While the scales are still tipped with many more men than women as leaders, there are now women who live and work as social pioneers and serve as role models for the future. There is, however, an absence of stories and images about women and men working together.

There is an emptiness in our collective imagination about the possibilities and tremendous benefits of equal partnership among women and men.

Throughout history the nature of relationship among women and men has served as a cornerstone for organizing and defining cultures, societies, and businesses. Ancient Taoists professed that the relationship of wife and husband establishes the foundation for the family, which in turn gives life to the society as a whole. The nature of relationship enacted among wife and husband creates the patterns of relationship within the family and beyond into business and community. But while society may indeed be based on the nature and quality of female-male relationships, traditional marriage no longer serves as the appropriate relational model for business. We must begin to recognize and celebrate successes created and shared by women and men working together in partnership.

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MUTUALITY OF PURPOSE

Purpose is essential to partnership. Purpose as an organizing principle has stood the test of time. Individuals, groups, businesses, indeed all organizations revolve around purpose. An organization's purpose creates an energetic attraction that draws customers, employees, shareholders, and often the eyes of the world. It is the nature and quality of purpose that gives meaning and guides the form of partnership appropriate to a given situation. The following four ways of creating mutuality of purpose apply to both interpersonal partnerships, such as among an employee and a manager, or two colleagues; and to organizational partnerships, such as among a company and a supplier, or a merger of two companies.

The most frequent and familiar sense of purpose comes from a sense of *mutual exchange*. This way of establishing or co-creating mutuality of purpose occurs when the parties involved have different intentions, goals, or purposes and need one another to achieve them successfully. On a personal level we might say this form of partnership operates when employees work and the company pays them. It is partnership based upon a mutually agreed exchange.

Organizations often form strategic alliances on this basis. Such is the case of partnership among two companies—one whose mission is driven by markets and sales, the other whose mission is driven by technology and products. Both companies can benefit in partnership with one another and yet maintain separate purposes and identities. Such a partnership provides one company with an expanded product line while providing the partner company with resources to continue technology-driven

product development. This defines the classic win-win situation. Each partner benefits from the relationship on his or her own terms.

This form of partnership requires that all partners know what they need and be able to clearly express their interests and needs. Mutual purpose is created through negotiation, requiring each partner to offer and counter-offer until a mutually agreed upon contract is established. The care and feeding of a mutual exchange partnership depends on the partners' ability to deliver on their deal. Partnership based on exchange requires that integrity and trust be nurtured for satisfaction as well as for productivity. When my ability to achieve my purpose depends on another, I must trust the other's integrity. To be satisfied and effective I must trust the other person to meet our agreements. The partnership relationship itself requires little attention. It seldom has its own name or identity. Its meaning is created and maintained in the terms of agreement and the partners' capacities to satisfy requirements.

A second way of co-creating mutuality of purpose in partnership is through the conscious creation of a *common agenda*. In this case partners share a common vision of what they intend to accomplish and how they intend to do it. A common agenda includes shared vision, mission, and values. Individuals achieve their personal goals and objectives as they work toward the achievement of the common agenda. Having a common agenda allows the partners to get on with business using their different approaches and different skills. Their common agenda liberates them to pursue their different areas of interest in the business. It creates a space for them to learn and to grow and to transfer new learnings into the business.

When mutuality of purpose is created via common agenda, individual partners contribute to the whole in much the way separate pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together to create the whole puzzle. With common agenda there is a recognizable whole to the partnership. Often the partnership and business are named and identified through their purpose. Such is the case with The Taos Institute, a consortium of colleagues dedicated to furthering social constructionist thought and practice as it applies to all levels of social change and well-being—personal, group, organizational, and global.

As individual partners change so will the partnership. It requires that change be consciously attended to by all partners. Partnerships based on common agenda places the dynamics of change at the center of the mandala of success. To be effective in a partnership organized for the purpose of achieving a mutually held common agenda, partners must be able to sense and discuss

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their own process of change. While personal growth and spiritual development is often described as a personal process, it has far-reaching relational implications.

With partnerships based on common agenda the individual partners' ability to work toward the common must be nurtured. For people of some cultures this comes naturally, for others this is indeed a difficult process. The value placed on individualism in education and work leaves many women and men without vision and ability to work toward the common, unless the personal stake is compelling. Common agenda—vision, mission, values, and guiding principles—needs nurturing and commitment by the partners involved. Without a willingness to work to the common, the common easily dissolves.

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A third way of conceiving mutuality of purpose in partnership is through *synergistic greater good*—the notion that the partnership exists for a purpose greater than the collective imagination of the partners. Partnership serves as a vehicle for the expression and realization of social innovation and/or a larger social cause. The Mountain Forum is a prime example. Organizations and individuals around the world are in partnership to foster the preservation and appreciation of mountain culture and environment globally. They are self-selected from a myriad of business, education, research, consulting, and nonprofit arenas to contribute to the evolving purpose called The Mountain Forum. Partners participate and contribute in a wide variety of ways. Some are actively working in mountain regions including Nepal, West Virginia, and Peru, while others are studying, writing, and teaching about mountain life and ecology. Still others are engaged with governments and funding sources to obtain the legislative and financial resources needed. Hundreds of people are engaged in efforts aimed toward the higher purpose of The Mountain Forum.

Business success when purpose stems from synergistic greater good depends on the partners' receptivity to change and commitment to service. On both a personal level and an organizational level, partners must be willing to go with the flow, while at the same time providing guidance to their business. This requires a willingness to learn and to co-create in the process of doing business. For the business to succeed, partners, staff, and customers must all be willing to learn. In an emerging industry such as alternative health care, it is the process of learning that leads to business success and growth as well as the co-creation of the industry. Such is also the case in the computer industry and the telecommunications industry, as emergent social constructions.

In order for synergistic greater good to work as the purpose of doing business, learning must be nurtured along with the processes for dialogue and democratic inquiry. Partnerships created to foster social innovation depend on the partners' willingness to learn, their capacities to explore the unknown, and their ability to operate in relation to life as a mystery unfolding. While the willingness and capacities of people involved are essential ingredients of the co-creation of innovation, the processes of communication enacted are paramount. Communication based on roles, position, and rules limits creative potential. Communication in search of problems and solutions perpetuates deficient thinking and needlessly closes doors to innovative visioning and creativity. Communication oriented toward life as a predictable pattern of action and reaction restricts the flow of creative possibilities. Processes of communication based on dialogue, deep listening, and inquiry, on the other hand, are invitations to explore the unknown, to discover and to learn. Learning is the foundation of all social creation and innovation.

A fourth way of co-creating mutuality in partnership is through attention to *social entelechy*—the process of allowing spiritual knowing and direction to unfold and manifest through the partnership. The notion is that partnership can be a channel of purpose and possibility that no one alone is called to be. Barbara McNeill, editor of *Noetic Sciences Review*, writes of entelechy, "It means something like having or fulfilling an essential, dynamic purpose."³ She further refers to Jean Houston's talk at the Institute of Noetic Sciences 1996 members' conference, "It is the entelechy of an acorn to be an oak tree; it is the entelechy of a baby to be a grown-up human being—it is every individual's entelechy to be uniquely who he or she is."

I am suggesting that some relationships and partnerships operate based on a sort of social entelechy in which the partnership can be said to have a unique and implicate purpose for being. Patti Martinson describes the relationship she and Terrie Bad Hand have as Co-Directors of The Taos County Economic Development Corporation in this way,

People don't understand why we work together. They think it is because we are lazy or something. They don't understand that we must work together because it's the only way the work we are supposed to do can get done. We are partners and our partnership allows a lot to happen. It's like it has a life of its own and we just have to live it.

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Patti and Terrie's partnership operates in the service of a rural, multicultural northern New Mexico community. The models of economic development they create with the people of Taos serve as models for rural economic development and gives life to new possibilities for rural development throughout the world. Emerging from their partnership is a new world order. They would not describe themselves as either cause or creators. They would say, its just what we do because of who we are together.

Perhaps all partnerships, personal and in business, have a social entelechy—a purpose for being that is uniquely their own and that guide their growth and service in the world. The artistry of leadership comes then in the practice of sensing social entelechy and of supporting its unfolding. Modern leadership and management theories speak of the need for purpose as an active creation on the part of leadership and the organization. For partnership based on social entelechy to flourish, active leadership must be balanced with receptivity—the capacity for deep listening and the ability to trust the creative muses that arise from silence, intuition, and relational knowing.

Partnerships that operate on social entelechy put the partnership first. Partners nurture the relationship as well as one another and the business. They start with a conscious commitment to their relationship and to relational responsibility—sharing the responsibility for their relationship, its actions, and effects. They build the business from there. Examples of this can be seen in the Mondragon Cooperative in Spain.⁴ The cooperative's bank lends money to new business start-ups only when partners are already friends and/or family members. This relational focus serves as foundation for their success in business development and it supports the development of business based on social entelechy.

I have worked extensively with Fortune 100 corporations engaged in processes of merger and/or acquisition. For most people involved, mergers are forced partnerships. The tendency is often to underestimate the potential of the partnership by focusing on the clarification of positions, roles, and organizational structures, and by overlooking the relational needs of the people and situation. Attention to the relational dynamics and to relationship building pay off in both performance and pride. Experience shows that "appreciative inquiry" among newly forming corporate partners—within functions and across functions—can create a sense of relational confidence and shared interest in conducting business together. In the process of exploring best practices, values, dreams, and life-giving forces, the implicate order of a newly forming partnership emerges. Purpose unfolds based

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upon what is possible and desirable. As values are expressed and witnessed, trust is generated as foundation for future.

PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

Partnerships in business take many forms. Within corporations, cross-functional relationships are being called partnerships. For example, human resource departments talk of partnering with line managers. Customers are being approached as partners in an attempt to evoke and enact a closer, more dependable, and reciprocal relationship. Among professional service providers such as doctors, lawyers, and management consultants, partnerships are seen as vehicles for expanding services, ensuring resource availability, and establishing a competitive position in the marketplace. Partnership is a viable alternative to organization based on the values of patriarchy. Whether partnership involves two, twenty, or two hundred people, there are relational practices common to effective partnership as a form of doing business.

- *Create domains of work based on strengths and interests.* Effective partnership is based on complementary action aligned with a mutual purpose. Perhaps one partner is a visionary, while the other thrives on getting the details in order. One partner enjoys putting systems in place; the other can sense trends emerging on the wind. One partner thinks out-of-the-box; the other understands political implications and consequences.

On a larger organizational level, Open Space⁵ as a process invites people to gather, to dialogue, and to work based on their interests. The process and those who engage in it trust that whatever happens is the only thing that could happen. Organizing based on human strengths and interest creates a sense of joy and liveliness not always present when we organize in ways that put the task before the people. Effective partnership requires a shift from fitting people into the organization to meet its needs to letting organization emerge from the complementary strengths and interests of the people. Companies professing that people are their most important resource can benefit by practicing partnership as a relational process for doing business.

- *Engage in relational responsibility.* Partners share responsibility for the actions and effects of the partnership as well as for the nature and quality of the partnership itself. Effective partnership carries not only the multiple

voices of the partners and their differing views but also the single voice of the partnership. Customers, employees, and other stakeholders do not hear conflicting views when they speak with different members of the partnership; rather, they hear an integrated story in which different opinions have been considered and aligned. The voice of the partnership is carried by all members and respected throughout the organization.

Relational responsibility requires a full-out commitment to the creation and nurturing of the relational dynamics of the partnership. It requires an awareness and gentle sensitivity to the emergence of members' identities in relation to one another and the business. It requires a process of personal and partnership reflection on values and their enactment, and it requires a negotiation and commitment to a specific form of mutuality of purpose. Relational responsibility is not about sharing responsibility for unintended consequences, or what goes wrong. It is about acknowledging the social construction of life and working in ways that collectively enliven positive, preferred possibilities.

- *Assume equality and balance the power.* The relational dynamics of partnership are characteristically demonstrations of equality and mutual respect. Partners play out a balance of power as they share talk time, invite one another's ideas and differing opinions, and refer and defer to each other in the conduct of business. One woman business partner puts it this way: "People get confused because they think equality means being the same or doing the same. The magic is in being very different and still being able to do business as equals. It would be horrible if I had to be involved in everything the same as my partner. The benefit of partnership is that you can do your own thing, your own way, and know that it will be okay with your partner. And even if you make a mistake it will be okay."

In *Stewardship*,⁶ Peter Block writes, "Partnership means to be connected to another in a way that the power between us is roughly balanced." For the partners of The Taos Herb Company, working out the balance of power required attention. Tina Hawley explained,

We had to consciously work out power issues. The men tended to be much more

dominant and to want to have control, so we had to work out a balance. Each of us now has a certain domain of power, so to speak. And as a woman I had to learn to claim my power working with my two male partners who are also my husband and my brother. It still takes courage for me to say that something doesn't feel right and I have to talk about it. I know when I do that I will be listened to. I believe in myself and I believe in my partners.

The balance of power among women and men plays out in a myriad of ways. The balance between feminine ways of knowing and masculine ways of knowing is essential for effective partnership. Intuition must be valued and relied upon as much as rational thinking and quantitative analysis. Emerging trends and business possibilities cannot be measured; however, they can often be sensed and known at an intuitive gut level. I work with one management team whose meetings start with the reminder, "The gut knows, and what the gut says goes." To bring a balance of power in the knowing processes of a partnership some partners (generally men) need to relinquish control and make space for others to speak and to be heard. Others (generally women) need to speak up and bring forth the often silent feminine voices of intuition, nurturing, and relational sense-making.

- *Value uniqueness and ensure essentiality.* Partnership is about equality among differences. Partnerships, including legal, contractual partnerships, are formed among people with differing interests, needs, capabilities, genders, dispositions, ages, and ethnic backgrounds. Much human communication is aimed at establishing uniqueness and essentiality. Partners need to know that they are unique in what they bring to the partnership, and that who they are and what they contribute is essential to the partnership. Differences are a badge of uniqueness and as such should be frequently discussed and highlighted among partners.

Effective partnerships are characterized by a mutual understanding and shared story about the partners' unique contributions to the business and to one another. Partners know each others' preferences and working styles

as well as their own. They can easily describe each others' strengths, interests, and eccentricities as well as the ways they are essential to the business. The partnership is an enactment of collaborative capacities. Each partner leads the partnership dance in certain relational domains and follows in others. In this way uniqueness and essentiality is honored and maintained.

- *Center communication on deep listening.* Effective partnerships are characterized by communication centered around listening rather than talking. Partners attend to their personal balance of talk and listening in order to create a listening-centered communication. During interviews with the partners who contributed to this writing, the occurrence of listening and sincere curiosity about each others' views was exemplary. They took turns talking and were very aware to balance talk time with attentive listening among themselves. They directly and indirectly managed the conversational process to ensure a balanced contribution both in terms of time and ideas. One would often ask the other to share a particular idea, or to express a differing point of view. There was a demonstrated respect for one another in their communication process.

Effective partnership grows on the ground of deep listening. Mutual attentiveness and interest in the others' thoughts and feelings establishes trust, which is essential for the well-being of the partnership and the growth of its members. Listening requires that partners can be with one another and listen to each others' ideas, feelings, and interpretations without being critical or otherwise inhibiting each others' expression. In the process of co-creation, the social construction of our realities, it is listening that enables the generation of ideas and action that meet the expressed needs and wants of the partners, customers, and, indeed, all stakeholders.

THE POSITIVE POSSIBILITIES OF PARTNERSHIP

As we move beyond the age of corporate individualism and into the global era of virtual relatedness, partnership becomes a model and means for business. As such, it is a viable alternative to working relationships and organizations based on patriarchal values. It demands that we consider equality and a balance of power central to life and to the conduct of business. To truly relate to another as a partner is to act with full recognition of differences and at the same time commit to working together in the creation of a mutually satisfying future.

Partnership as a relational practice and a way of doing business provides value in many ways. As Feeny Lipscomb, partner in All One Tribe, so aptly said, "The business really benefits from our partnership. It benefits by having all of what it needs, and as a result it is able to feed people on many levels. People look to us for different things. When it's really working there is a completeness to it. Together we bring harmony and a sense of balance and completeness to the business." Right relationship can be a path to right livelihood and business success.

Partnership benefits the people involved as it provides a space for them to express their needs and dreams, to work from their strengths and interests, to learn and to become in relation to each other. Partnership is the fertile ground upon which the seeds of human potential can grow.

The practice of partnership plants the seeds of global well-being as an alternative to patriarchy and Euro-modern dominance. Partnership generates possibilities for a future full of mutual respect and regard for human spirit in all its embodied forms. As we approach the new millennium, many of us are asking what we can do to make the world a better place. I suggest we practice partnership as a way of creating a new world order.

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Diana Whitney can be reached at The Taos Institute, P.O. Box 3257, Taos, NM 87571. Phone: 505-751-1232; fax: 505-751-1233. E-mail: whitneydi@aol.com.
