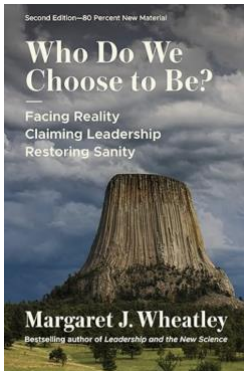


'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

DO YOU LOVE BOOKS ON LEADERSHIP, NEUROSCIENCE, AND BUSINESS, BUT NOT HAVE TIME TO READ ALL THE BOOKS?

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April 2024

Who Do We Choose to Be?

Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity.

By Margaret J. Wheatley

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Diane L. Dixon, EdD

Overview

Who Do We Choose to Be? is an invitation to engage in a journey to discover a path to meaningful leadership and contribution. Wheatley describes the time we are in as uncertain and chaotic, and for this reason, we need to face reality to be able to make a difference. She believes this "Age of Threat" causes us to be in survival mode, fleeing from one another, abandoning values that held us together, withdrawing from ideas and practices that encouraged inclusion and created trust in leaders, and most harmfully, we stop believing in one another. Wheatley states, **"My aspiration is for you to see clearly so that you may act wisely. Only when we know where we are, will we be able to choose a meaningful path forward."**

Throughout the book Wheatley invites us to consider 'who we are', and 'who we choose to be.' She wants us to discern whether we choose to embrace the role of **"Warriors for the Human Spirit."**

Book Design

Wheatley indicates that the book design is based on her process for knowing what to do and how best to use her heart, mind, energy, and influence to meaningfully serve as things fall apart. The three subtitles of the book describe her process:

- **Facing Reality**—First we need to understand what is going on working to see as clearly as possible beyond our usual filters. Where are we and how did we get here? As dynamics play out, what lies ahead?
- **Claiming Leadership**—Grounded in facing reality, we discern what to do. How can we use our skills and open hearts in ways that benefit people and situations? What is good leadership in this crazed, conflicted world? What skills and sensitivities do leaders need to serve well in this time? Can we choose to be Warriors for the Human Spirit?

- **Restoring Sanity**—Leadership with the intention that our work restores sanity—discovering new and ancient ways to evoke our best human qualities. How do we lead as an Island of Sanity, creating conditions for people to be generous, creative, and kind?

Summary of Book Sections

1. THE ARROW OF TIME—Everything Has a Beginning, A Middle, and an End

- a. **Facing Reality**—“A healthy living system is an intelligent learner. It can adapt and survive even though its environment is moving toward increasing disorder. But it must be actively engaged and aware, never losing focus on its environment. Failing to pay attention and adapt is a prescription for death.”

Wheatley states that **for the first time in history, humans have changed the planet's environment rather than adapting to it.**

- b. **Claiming leadership**—Wheatley states “**choosing to lead well in collapse,**” when we remain open, we become alive as a living system capable of self-organizing into new order rather than succumbing to disorder. She raises the question—What is good leadership? She suggests that we consult our experiences with good and bad leadership for the answer. And she thinks it is important to explore---Where is your organization on the Arrow of Time? This assessment yields real learning from noticing what's changing, and in which direction.
- c. **Restoring Sanity**—Wheatley believes good leadership is required to create “**Islands of Sanity**” places of possibility and sanctuary where destructive dynamics of collapse are kept at bay.

2. IDENTITY—Living Systems Change to Preserve Themselves

- a. **Facing Reality**—Wheatley describes, **Identity Then**—Traditionally cultures defined identity as who you were, what you thought, and what you did was predetermined by where you were born; not a personal choice. **Identity Now**—What is happening now, wars and famine are forcing people to relocate. Although this has been occurring since the beginning of human history, the scale of this in modern times is presenting one of most challenging problems for nations of the affluent world. According to Wheatley, **the new reality is a global culture has taken hold.** At the consumer level global culture is evident in the music, movies, fashion, food, products, and technology we share. On a personal level it is evident in alienation, addiction, violence, and suicide.
- b. **Claiming Leadership**—Leading with faith—contemplative discernment, remaining steadfast to principles and practices, participative processes for decision-making, embodying the power of collective wisdom, leading from the future.
- c. **Restoring Sanity**—Using faith as an antidote to fear. Reflecting on leadership and action: **Do you know what you're faithful to? Have you defined what's of real value, what you stand for, what you will continue to work for even when it becomes hard and disappointing? Have I been faithful to the vision that gave rise to the intention that led me to actions that didn't work? Have I been faithful to my values, to my clarity?**

3. INFORMATION—A Difference That Makes a Difference

- a. **Facing Reality**—Wheatley observes, how we receive and use information has significantly been reshaped by high-speed delivery, universal access, social media, Googling, and algorithms. The uses

of information in the 21st century have made a significant difference in reshaping and informing participants in the global culture.

She describes the **Age of Algorithms**—Artificial Intelligence is embedded in everything we use and algorithms rule decision-making and social media. Instead of us defining our identity, algorithms learned how to define us. She suggests that **we have to recognize what's been forfeited to computers: the freedom to determine who we want to be and our birthright to be a human consciously being.** “**We need to wake up and reconnect with who we truly are and always have been—vibrant human spirits capable of caring, creativity, and community.**”

- b. **Claiming leadership**—Wheatley raises the question—is it possible to change minds? “We can’t change one another’s minds, but we can **create the conditions to wake up our better angels.**” Contemplation, reflection, inquiry, calmness, openness to new ideas become possible when we are a space of good relationships. “**A recipe for creating mind change has three basic ingredients: a relationship for mutual respect; genuine curiosity about one another; and a process that requires good listening.**”
- c. **Restoring Sanity** is possible by collective sense-making. Relying on diversity and inclusion to solve complex problems grounded in the fundamentals of healthy group process.

4. PERCEPTION—What You See Is All You Get

- a. **Facing Reality**—Wheatley believes “Western thinking confuses intellect with intelligence, but Yogic intelligence is located throughout the body in cells and organs that respond to what’s going on; influenced by a stream of memories. Intellect is the sensemaking function, and to make sense, it uses identity.”

According to Wheatley, all human cultures have ways of knowing beyond the five senses. “There are other ways of knowing reality, reliable methods that have served humans and earlier hominid for millennia. It is the arrogance of our science that denies their existence and their usefulness.”

- b. **Claiming Leadership**—The Last Human Freedom—“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” *Viktor Frankl, Search for Meaning.* Wheatley advises that we...
 - Take care about the stories we tell ourselves and share with one another. Do they create possibility, or cause us to cower in fear? Do they connect us to reality, or transport us to fantasy lands? Do our stories encourage competence, or rob us of sanity?
 - **A critical leadership skill** is to be aware of organizational stories. With this awareness, leaders create the conditions for people to consciously choose which story they want to live into.
- c. **Restoring Sanity**—Wheatley suggests a practice for using stories in a crisis: **Discover the main stories**—the ones that keep being embellished and spreading; **Discern the key narratives** from the many comments; **Create a hospitable space** for describing the stories. As share and listen to their stories they may be shocked to hear the story they have been contributing to. The surprise creates an opening to raise this question—**Is this the meaning we meant to create?** As collective group ask, **Which story do we want to make real?**

5. INTERCONNECTEDNESS—Nothing Living Lives Alone

- a. **Facing Reality**—Wheatley defines-- **“Collaboration is the process that creates a thriving ecosystem; greed destroys it. Interconnectedness is a relationship among equals bound together in networks of mutuality.**

Wheatley believes that **Western scientists and leaders feel trapped by interdependency, so they describe interbeing as “entanglement.” She thinks we need a different worldview to create healing. Indigenous people hold this original wisdom—“one human identity as participants in the web of life.”**

- b. **Claiming Leadership**—Wheatley believes when leaders know the strength that comes from relationships, when community is the basis for everything, when conflict and crisis are recognized as a community challenge, and when we know that to heal anything we must strengthen connections, possibilities emerge for addressing the challenges we face. She thinks that while using this worldview to explore the major issues cannot stop their trajectories set in motion at the global level, great insight can be gained for how to form and lead *“Islands of Sanity.* Wisdom Keepers know how things work in an interdependent world.
- c. **Restoring Sanity**—Wheatley believes sanity is restored through the Beauty of Belonging and Joy of Interbeing. She feels belonging is the path to healing. She defines balance as not being an individual pursuit, but rather, existing with other beings in the web of life. She thinks joy is found in interbeing, the experience of communion, of “being one with” beyond the boundaries of self.

6. EMERGENCE—Life is Full of Surprises

- a. **Facing Reality**—Wheatley believes we have worked hard to stop the disastrous paths of climate change, injustice, poverty, discrimination, oppression, and war. But it is impossible stop these disasters and tragedies because “emergent phenomena can never be undone.”

She explains that “once a new culture has emerged, patterns and behavior take hold and feed on themselves; anger turns into hatred, despair turns into suicide, injustice turns into protests and forceful oppression. The system generates more of itself, no matter how disastrous.” Wheatley states that “this is why all complex civilizations eventually collapse; dynamics and behaviors have been set in motion that are unstoppable and irreversible.”

- b. **Claiming Leadership—Creating Islands of Sanity**
Wheatley believes that our task is **“To create the conditions, both internally and within our sphere of influence, where sanity prevails, where people can recall and practice the best human qualities of generosity, caring, creativity, and community.” We need to create places at work and in our communities that protect people from the destructive dynamics of this culture, a sanctuary, a trusted place of refuge and support, and reawaken their human spirits.**

7. WARRIORS FOR THE HUMAN SPIRIT—It’s Just Our Turn to Serve

- a. **Claiming Leadership**—Wheatley believes, “We need leaders who recognize the harm being done to people and the planet through the dominant practices that control, ignore, abuse, and oppress the human spirit. **We need leaders who put service over self, stand steadfast in crises and failures, and who display unshakable faith that people can be generous, creative, and kind.**”

- b. Restoring Sanity**--She cautions that as Warriors, we need to give up the addiction to hope. This does not mean going down the path of hopelessness, rather, we need to develop skills of clarity, clear perception so that we can see clearly how to contribute in meaningful ways. Wheatley encourages the reader to open to the world as it is. As a result, there will be strong emotions that we need to expect, embrace, understand, then use them to keep our hearts open.

For You: Who Have You Become as a Leader? Who Do You Choose to Be?

About the Book Club In this monthly club, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, neuroscience, or coaching. Membership is not required, and there's no obligation to pre-read the book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For the full set of discussion summaries, [click here](#).