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*Musings:  
Detour from Dynamic Engagement*

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## Detour from Dynamic Engagement

BY MIKE R. JAY, DEVELOPMENTALIST

# MUSINGS

**R**emember in my last musing where I stated I was going to do Part Two of leadership as dynamic engagement? Well, that's too big a leap for most, so let me talk about one of my favorite topics, one which a number of my colleagues also find juicy—SAGE Leadership. The reason for the detour is that dynamic engagement is a heady, complex approach that, quite frankly, few people will be interested in until they run into the cul-de-sac of their favorite theory road, if you catch my driving here.

While on the other hand SAGE Leadership is an archetype of the times. Yes, archetype, like in Jung. Interesting work is being done these days around the globe regarding archetypes. I suspect it will become the next big thing coaching will swing around because of the work Clotaire Rapaille is doing with his new book, *The Culture Code*. I reviewed it here, if you're interested: <http://www.the-culture-code.com/bookreview>.

Yet Rapaille's archetypes leave you wanting...a coach, for sure, but on to SAGE Leadership.

SAGE as an archetype is perhaps different than many would suggest as a leadership style, although depending upon whose definition of the SAGE archetype you read, the type of leadership drawn from the Jungian archetype might not be a bad place

to begin. I'll let you decide that, but for now, here's how I want to play with this leadership game.

SAGE in my idea of reality is an acronym rather than an archetype. Here's why. Way back in the beginning of my musings history I have made mention of subject-object relations. These relations are described by Robert Kegan in either *The Evolving Self*, or *In Over Our Heads*, take your pick. For those of you who are more determined to get into the practice of defining the subject and object (and most of you calling yourself executive coaches should become "immediately" conversant in this theory, of course in my opinion) in your client's espoused theory or theory in use (Argyris), then you will want to get your hands on the SOI Guide to Interviewing from Kegan's office at Harvard. He's in education, just call his office and say you want the Subject-Object Interviewing Guide from 1988, I believe if my failing memory serves me.

Ok, now, here's really why you need to understand SAGE as an acronym or a metaphor and not as an archetype.

Archetypes are present in everything we do, however the FIRST test for a SAGE leader in my theory is that they are at a minimum self-authoring (Kegan's level 4). This is important and why I provided the off-ramp to Kegan above. Other-directed leaders (Kegan level 3), or what some call socializing subject-object relations make up their identity from those around them. While this might seem wonderful to many, it's not so great to have a leader in this kind of relativistic position.

A SAGE leader in my view looks to others to provide data, but sorts the facts using his or her own principles of how the world works—perhaps even utilizing the skill of others to do these tasks. So, to me, SAGE leadership has a specific level of development mastered or matured before they ever crawl into the SAGE brush. (Had to get in a reference to the Oregon Trail you know, because we have a lot of SAGE all around us, but not many SAGE leaders to speak of.) Catch my meaning here? To use a Forest Gumpism...SAGE is as SAGE does...not as SAGE is brushed by others!

In a few words, here's the SAGE model:

S in SAGE stands for spiritual, for without spirit no amount of leadership can be wise in a world of doing and non-doing.

A in SAGE stands for actionable, and I could and will probably someday write a book on this very term. Many have tried, many have died, but most are not actionable. The illusion of actionability in leadership today is delusion. Why aren't most leaders creating actionable followings? Because of the lack of development, which means the inability to differentiate the integrated!

Huh?

Well, you heard it here first, folks. Just kidding. The psychobabble aside...without perspective and the ability to see not only around corners, but to hear through the noise, or feel the vibration...most of the junk called leadership today won't get you rated in Moody's or anywhere else. Am I pessimistic? No, but I'm not optimistic either...I guess as Wil Durant said in *Lessons of History*..."I'm a realist." And that, my dear friends, is where actionable starts.

There's too much vision thing, especially when we start talking about all this shared vision malarkey that is passed around by pundits who never made a serious

payroll. Anything that is shared is in big trouble. If you don't believe me, travel to Russia.

Actionable means that I understand and have evaluated the resources I have as a leader, including human resources, and I understand and have evaluated the reality of business and organization in the network perspective...and I know how to create the language I need to say that which creates what needs to be heard, felt and experienced by the people who are inspired to follow.

Believe me, this is easier said than done, but if you see any SAGE model that is undifferentiated along these lines and treats everyone the same, view everything through shared lenses, then head the other way, as we say out here in the west. G in SAGE stands for generative. And that's what you get if you have the S and the A in place. Generative-ness, or generativity as some might call it, is where we create multiple wins. For a long time, we've heard about the win-win proposition. That has served us for a time, but it's the win-win that has produced global warming! Yikes, what did I say? Yes, we have too long operated on a local basis...if we could see it, feel it, touch it, hear it, or taste it, then we were talking win-win. What happened?

What happened was the lack of a non-local connection. We only recently discovered that win-win won't allow us to hide the environmental issues we've created... that win-win doesn't explain why human resources gets exploited as fast as you can say, globalization.

Nope, in my view, there are few SAGE leaders to model...because win-win doesn't cut it anymore. Unless leadership is generative, and it solves more problems than it creates...unless it is both local and non-local in its consequences, it ain't SAGE! E stands for ecological. Of course you might expect that seeing how you have read through the rant this far. But when I talk ecological, I'm not only talking green-peace here, folks. I'm talking the ecology of network dynamics. It is impossible to be spiritual, actionable and generative without having the ecology of things in mind. Whether that be the ecology of a family system, a community network, or the planet's moans and groans.

While the environment is important, which environment are we talking about... how about the environment of mind, or the environment of work, or the environment of our consequences? Our narrow-focused "blinking" around has created a wonderful set of special problems that could only from the narrowest of stewardship emerge. Enabling people in an organization to function with their strengths requires ecologically prowess in a manner I can't explain in a few short sentences. Oh yes, I believe dynamic engagement is essential, but without SAGE leadership, it's all just another game to play to keep the leadership tabloids full of pages and a way in which to ignore the real problems while we rearrange the nameplate on our office.

Back in the spring of 2006, if my memory serves me, I seem to recall an article in one of the 'weeks', either news or business which stated that China would be short more than 75,000 leaders within a few years. I wonder who wrote that article and what ecology they come from. They should have noticed that in the US, we are short hundreds of thousands of leaders, let alone SAGE leaders!

We lack leaders in Congress, the Senate, in the executive branch, the government, business, entrepreneurship and even...ouch, this is going to sting...in coaching. By the time this gets to press, the largest organization of "coaches" will have conducted its Future of Coaching Summit in Vancouver. Lord willing, I will have

attended and I have no idea what will have happened and then again, I do know before it happens what will happen.

Will there be evidence of SAGE leadership in this special calling of the world's special coaches?

Hmmm. What I am about to say will incriminate me for sure...NO!  
Our very own industry lacks SAGE leadership for the reasons I've stated above. WE are the blind leading the blind. And that's what's so special about coaching. Thousands of so-called coaches, many who dare call themselves leadership coaches...have no idea of what they are doing. We march along behind the academic drumbeat of leaders who can't lead and leaders who have led us to the brink of disaster with their fancy models, their outstanding leadership only to find the world is now a worse place than when they had it handed over to them. Hmmm, SAGE leadership examples? I just don't think we're there yet.

I must call myself out here and as I write this now too long musing...realize that espoused theory is just no longer good enough. During the past year I have challenged myself to become a more SAGE-like leader, a more dispassionate coach, a more compelling mentor and a more generative facilitator. Much of this is beyond me, as I'm not fully awake and don't know if I will awaken in this lifetime. But as I leave you here today in the midst of the SAGE brush...I challenge YOU to consider yourself, your leadership and your actions in a more spiritual, actionable, generative and ecological-based leadership paradigm as we all stir in this nest together.

Next time, dynamic engagement for sure!

*Mike Jay*

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