This transcript is from a talk given by David Sibbet at the Thought Leader Gathering in Minneapolis in February 1, 2008. Thought Leader Gatherings are hosted by Heartland Circle, an organization dedicated to convening conversations, programs, trainings, and communities of engagement, dedicated to creating love in action for a world that works for all.

Introduction: Craig Neal

The conversation starter is one among us who has a unique offering. They are not necessarily a member, but have an important offering for us. They have a story of their journey to offer to this community. David is a longtime member of the Bay area Thought Leader Gathering and a dear, dear friend.

Earlier in 2007 David and I journeyed to Africa together for the month of March. It was an amazing trip together. We got to know each other pretty well at a lot of different levels, sleeping on the ground in tents. We were deep in Tanzania in the bush in a place where we had to depend on each other, psychically, emotionally and physically. What I learned from that trip was the deep well that David is. David also is the founder of The Grove Consultants International but also, and I’m not sure of his exact title, President, CEO, perhaps mentor or elder. He has pioneered graphic facilitation. But it goes beyond that. He is a master facilitator and a master convener in his own right. He has taught thousands of people and worked inside organizations all over the world, large and small. Even more than that is the deep well I speak of, of this guy raised in the Sierra mountains of California, a deep sense of nature, an artist who has chronicled his life and the life of many of us in the 100s of journals he has like that in his lap, and has created a living, beautiful tapestry of what he has seen in his life. We have asked David to come to share with us what it is to be an artist as a leader and in his life, in community, and to tell his story and his journey. Notice the screen over here. We are going to give a shot with some electronics as we go. So David, thank you for joining us.

David Sibbet

The Artistry of Leadership: The Role of Design, Participation & Community

Last night when I checked into the hotel, I called my wife Susan who is in New York right now, in fact, one hour ago, giving her seven-minute talk about California Poets in the Schools to the Modern Language Association. She’s been chairman of that, and helped save it after it lost a huge amount of California Arts Council funding following the Enron crisis and state deficit struggles... She doesn’t travel around quite as much as I do, but being in New York and talking with Random House editors, and being with her friends she was really pumped.
She realized our talks are simultaneous. She asked, “so what are you talking about?” I told her that Craig and Patricia cooked up this title “The Artistry of Leadership: The Role of Design, Participation and Community.”

“So you’re going to be going for six days?” Susan said.

I must tell you, Craig, that this title you picked out is really upsetting the apple cart. It’s really interesting for a couple of reasons.

“It’s our job, David” (Craig replied)

You’ll understand why it’s such a disturbing topic when you hear about what my journey is. Also Craig likes to call up and make sure you are aligned with what is going on. The Thought Leader Gatherings set a high standard. What is so wonderful is the impeccability of the container. You’d think you could just get your chairs in a circle and kind of do this. But every time—to look at the principles, acknowledge the participants, get the grace notes—I mean… it’s a wonderful thing. And I think it’s perfect that this centerpiece looks like an egg and not a circle this morning—but I’ll get around to that.”

So what’s been happening since this invitation is I’ve been thinking about these words: the “artistry of leadership.” It’s not the “Art of Leadership,” it’s the “artistry” of leadership.

I’m used to believing that what is moving in a situation has a much larger force, much deeper roots and volumes of upstream things that I can always think about. In many ways I think of the facilitation that I do as midwifery. I always imagine that something is wanting to be born and I have to be a steward of its emergence. It is very different mentality than industrial age engineering where you think you need large machinery and terraforming to have anything happen.

Approaching my work as midwifery is really a gift that I owe Susan. It’s been a journey getting there. Craig asked me to share what “informs” my work, so I’d like to spend some time doing that.

I am the oldest of four boys. I was raised in the mountains. My dad is a very charismatic minister. At 92 he is still a practicing minister in a Congregation church in Weaverville, California, up in the Trinity alps. I’ve had all the ups and down with him as with any parent, but he is now blowing my mind with what it means to live your life forward. I remember Richard Leider, who took us to African trip, says that those elders that seem to survive the best are the ones that reinvent themselves many times, and those that reinvent themselves to a higher purpose do the very best. So I have a living example in my father in that regard.

But my historical legacy was that of a mountain man, not a midwife, and I was shaped by the Eastern Sierra and its people. Something intersected with his life, and he couldn’t be a doctor and became a minister. He had this
idea that church, which means community (if you go back to the original words for church) wouldn’t do so well in cities. So he majored in rural ministry, and his first assignment was truly rural. They sent him to the boonies of California, the Eastern Sierra, which I now see as the Tibet of California—it’s in the same relationship to California as Tibet is to India. Paradoxically, when LA came and took all the water out of Owens Valley in the 1920s (if you’ve seen Chinatown it is about Bishop) the entire Easter Sierra became reserved as park, for no development is possible without water rights. Bishop itself is only 5000 people. There were only a couple of ranchers that held out against LA.

Interesting for me, however, was the fact that the church was on Main Street, with the manse behind. So I was as much in the city as I could be in a tiny town, but out of my bedroom window I could see the to the west the 13,800 ft. peak of Mt. Tom, and look east I could see the 14,260 ft peak of White Mountain Peak, which locals believe is actually taller than Mt. Whitney. In fact it’s the deepest, grabben valley in the world, so much so the astronauts can see it from space. It is also the home of the bristlecones, the oldest trees in the world. So every single day my awareness was 20 by 20 miles by 10,000 feet and thousands of years backwards and forwards in geologic time. You don’t live in a valley like that, with mountains like that without being effected. It developed in me a taste for spaciousness.

And then there are other levels of reality. My father, I think, was more touched by Walt Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson than he was the bible. Although the bible was very instructive, he’s not theologically an ideologue. He’s a romantic. So after the sermons we would head for the mountains. I kind of got this idea as a little kid that nature was the real church. Fortunately the church I was a part of was a healthy church community. The people there, during that period from age 4 to 14 when I lived there, were in service to each other and the town of Bishop in extraordinary ways.

My father’s best friend was a country doctor named Bob Denton. Bob Denton is my size, 5’6” and has a hair lip. Dr. Bob Denton talks like this (with a soft palette), and, has the most amazing way of listening to people and telling stories about everything. He believes that 50% of medicine is storytelling. This guy has a PhD. in chemistry from the University of Chicago and an MD from the University of Chicago. His father was country doctor in Bridgeport and his granddaughter is a country doctor in Truckee. He is as much a mountain man, shaman, storyteller, guide, leader as you can get. When I think about all these words I think about Bob Denton.

He and my father took me “hunting” when I was 13. But they weren’t taking me hunting—they were doing something, but it wasn’t hunting. But it was all in the name of hunting. “Hunting deer” was the big ritual. So we go up to 10,500 feet above McGee
Creek and we camp out and they ceremoniously give my first hunting knife. It would be my first time carry a rifle as well. We get into the sleeping bag and it was COLD and it was even colder in the morning when we had to get out of the sleeping bag—and you had to get out of the sleeping bag before the sun comes up because up there the deer can hear anything, and head for the hills during hunting season. To even see a deer you have to get out before they do.

So the three of us are there, and the way we do this is to pick a place we think the deer might be, and sit quiet as a mouse all day long waiting. So my Dad and I pick a place on the slope of the hill, figuring the deer will be up high in the morning, and then in the afternoon come down the saddle and over to the creek to get some water. If we are totally still this will work. So I sit there. Hour one, hour two, hour three. It’ 11:00. The flies are going around. We can’t make a sound. Then we start hearing shots in the upper part of the canyon. Dad’s saying “that’s great, it’ll chase the deer down.”

Then we see it. We see movement. And then, RIGHT through the saddle, comes a HUNTER, walking along like there was no tomorrow, right down to the creek. And begins target practicing with his pistol.

This is where I learned how enlightened grown men might become killers. My dad and Bob Denton were not thrilled about this. They were mostly talking about it, not doing anything. But we came back and did not even seeing deer. So you get the picture. I was not only raised in the mountain man tradition but trained in it.

So what did I know about women and midwifery? Not much. My heroes were cowboys, rodeo clowns. Aim Morhardt my art teacher, the first person who saw the spark in me, was a bit macho himself. He was a song writer from Columbia Records who got tired of the rat race in LA. He was as possessed by prospecting and ballad writing as he was by art. He and Bob Denton were best friends. Aim didn’t really like my dad too much, because my dad was full of himself, and didn’t listen to Aim as much as Aim wanted, because Aim was kind of full of himself. You know how it is. When someone really annoys, the principles of annoyance is that you probably have something to look at. But Aim saw me, and my natural ability to draw. Somehow my being color blind to red green didn’t bother him. He encouraged the artist.
He fanned to life an orientation first ignited by a violent thing that happened to me in the first grade.

(Pause)....I’m still on the “what informs me part” I have 20 minutes? Good.

They didn’t have Ritalin when I was in the first grade. I was ready to go. My after-burners were lit. I could read. My grandmother taught me to read. I was a handful so they’d give me double-homework. It didn’t work. I began to do the homework of my seatmate Lance White. He tells his parents. His parents call the school. The school calls me in on a Saturday and give me a battery of tests. When they get the tests back they said, “line up in the second grade.” There was no process at all.

Can you imagine what it is like to be in one of three first grade classes, fully bonded, and then move into a second grade group with one more year of bonding? I was completely ripped off socially. Now I was a year younger, small anyway, and de-socialized. I’ve tried everything to remember that period, including hypnosis, but I can’t remember. I went into shock. But what I do remember is waking up in the third grade drawing a mural of Machu Picchu stone by stone, and drawing a realistic picture of an Indian chief on a horse, and discovered my compensating personae, artist intellectual. My teacher that year, a Mrs. Young, was thrilled.

This is who Susan married. She is the middle of five daughters in a naval officers home. Her grandfather was Chief of Naval Operations for the United States under Roosevelt and ambassador to Russia. Her own father was a navy captain, and married her mother in the US Vice President’s house. So Susan was raised in the closest thing to military aristocracy that there is. Yet it was a woman’s world, controlled by men who mostly weren’t there, where beauty and duty was what was expected. So Susan knew macho, but within a cocoon of femininity. I was raised by a minister, where receptivity, community, and transcendentalism were respected, but energetically he was big and macho. So we each had pieces of the whole, and saw in each other fulfillment. It was a typical kind of thing. I didn’t have a neck yet. I was geeking around with my artist intellectual head. She had had two babies already, and was completely integrated with her body. She’s tests out as a sensory feeler on the Meyers Briggs. Forty years later we have been criss cross influences on each other, and midwifery means something to me now, thanks to Susan, and two more kids, and five grandchildren.

So “Artistry of Leadership: The Role of Design, Participant and Community.” The word artistry suggests a practice involving the other three.

My professional orientation to art and design was informed early on when I was creating Sibbet & Associates, and then Graphic Guides, and The Grove, by a paper someone sent me from the University of Sussex. It was mounting the argument that design ought to be added to the arts and science
curriculum. The arts, it claimed, holds as a value expressing the inner truth—the fierceness of your songs, Barbara, and the poems we heard earlier. This is the inner truth, the world of feeling. Suzanne Langer, in her book *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, argued with William James that the overarching word for consciousness ought to be feeling, not intellect—that intellect is just a crust over the top of a big envelope of feeling, and the role of artists is to get below what the mind sees to give expression to the reservoir of feelings.

Science, claimed the Sussex paper, is about truth in the universe. What is predictably true? What are the patterns we can count on? So a scientist can study something for two or three years on a grant, end with more questions than he started with, and get another grant. It is about getting right down to what it is. I started out in physics in college, caught up in the post-Sputnik focus on all things scientific and technical. I found that at the edges of science were discoveries that the foundational “elements” or forces in the universe are uncertain, that quantum physics was spreading as a revolution in thinking, that one needed to think about frames of reference, and folded time. But it was all in the name of the outer truth.

In the middle is this domain called design, the paper said. So what is design? Design is objective oriented activity where you have a goal, limited time, limited information, all kinds of variables, and you need to come up with something that achieves the objectives. This is very different intent from either art or science and ought to be a whole curriculum with its own practices, the paper claimed. Design holds a very different set of standards of excellence than art or science. Why should the design practice be in the professional schools only, the paper asked? Why shouldn't kids be taught design? This made sense to me.

When I first started my business I worked next door to a consulting firm called Interaction Associates that was in pursuit of this idea of applying design practices to teaching. They thought that the way architectures did problem solving would help in schools. They developed a facilitator/recorder methodology and set out to professionalize facilitation. They inspired me to begin trying these methods with the Coro Fellows in Public Affairs I was training.

So am I an artist? I think of myself as a designer. I live in that space where I never have enough time. Right now the timing on my talk is out the window. There are corporate people who want to hear about practical things. I'm talking about midwifery. Will I get to the point? Is there a point? I don’t know. I’m heading there. That is the life of a designer. I put it out there, prototyping, refining, getting feedback, redesigning. And there is artistry in this practice.

But what is the leadership part? What is the participation part?

I actually have a problem with the term “leadership.” I spent eight years doing training in public affairs with the
Coro Foundation. We didn’t talk about leadership, a concept that became fashionable in the Reagan era. We talked about governance. We were trying to prepare people for public affairs, which is all about collaboration and working together. What doesn’t it mean to hold the responsibility for governing, we’d ask? Our assumption was that it is a group activity. You don’t govern with individuals, you govern with circles, parliaments, boards, management teams and committees. So I spend years studying how cities govern themselves. I led experiential program where people had internships in government, politics, business, labor, community, and media organizations, and then come back in seminar on Friday trying to make sense out of it. In this whole effort grew Group Graphics. It became visual dialogue. It let us see the interconnections between things. It helped us transform our field trip stories into shared stories of how things work. Stories are the glue or organizations, and our way of making meaning. For governance people need a group story. Group stories grow out of continuous work together, like the ten years you’ve been holding Thought Leader Gatherings. But what is the quality of a story when management teams aren’t intact? The average tenure of a modern CEO is 2.5 years? I’ve worked in private family companies. There’s a different. You can’t retire from a family. But in publically traded companies it’s different.

Just last night, talking to my stepbrother, I encountered this problem of corporations losing their story. When I was a lot younger my parents divorced and my mom married a former Lt. Colonel from the British navy who had become an accountant here in the states. He passed away recently and his oldest son and I have been thrown together to manage my Mom’s estate. He was raised in the UK, was a Marine pilot in Vietnam, and for years a financial manager and analyst in New York City. So I’m being thrown into work with him, back into macho land. But for the first time he’s going to a therapist exploring feelings, and beginning to see that the gift of his father marrying my mother is getting to know the Sibbets. His firm was just taken over by the Bank of America, and he is experiencing his beautiful, 100 year old financial advisory group being crushed by BofA’s bureaucracy. I could hear the pain as he talked about it. His old story has crumbled. It made me wonder what we are doing letting big systems run us by their numbers.

At the same time there seems to be a renaissance, an awakening happening.

So leadership, why is that a troublesome term for me? It’s not that leadership isn’t important and present, but it can’t function without many other things, and attention to these things seems to be less easy to manage.

My thinking links back to my work as a graphic facilitator. My artistry there is superficially about drawing. It’s more deeply about systems of thinking and systems thinking itself.
Drawing and imagery is the way we understand systems. We create pictures of things or mental models of things we can’t sense directly. Take Midland Country Club here for instance. We see trees out the windows. We walked through a lobby with staff offices to the side. We piece together a mental model to understand how it all works. We all have mental models about things we don’t experience directly, about how things connect. In fact, I think that what we mean by “being organized” is having a shared idea (or story) about how things connect. The metaphor embedded in the word “organization” is “organ.” What’s significant is how these are linked in our body, not their individual function. The relationships—the heart to the lungs to the lymph to the thyroids to the crown chakra—are key. We draw pictures of systems in our minds whether or not we are artists. We have holodeck-level imaginations. Some of you may connect things with somatic information, totally as a feeling body. Some tell stories, that weave like tapestries. Some of you may sing or write music, or write poetries. But we all make sense by creating and designing patterns that connect. So the artistry that is my deep artistry is making these system pictures explicit, of trying to look at these operating systems we all work from by literally “drawing them out.” So I’ve been a student of things like this yin yang symbol in our centerpiece. This one has flowers, and a sidebar of pens. Is this a model or improvisation on a model? I think it is an application program with the yin/yang operating system underneath! (Laughs) This is how my mind works now, with layers and layers of pattern recognition from years of visualizing meetings, journaling, and crafting stories. I’m a deep student of how people represent organizational ideas.

“You want to see if we can put any of this stuff up here (on the projector). You want to actually try it?” Craig asks.

“Craig has actually encouraged me to actually show you some things (laughter again). Let me conclude with a few ideas and then I’ll share some images.” I said.

Why is participation and community essential to leadership? If leadership is not individual but collective, if the real challenge of our times is systems thinking and coming to an ecological frame of mind, which I believe if the great challenge of our times. We need to go from being an engineering society to an ecological society if we are going to make it and not wisker off the evolutionary path. My dream is we will become eco-scientists and understand how things work in nature, including human nature. That requires systems thinking and thinking about thinking. For a leader to not involve people is to not understand leadership and governance from this perspective. You have to have other people.

What is the community part?

It is really hard to change systems. Just try to change yourself, your own little system. I’m a gardener, and have observed that it takes me as long to change myself as it takes to
reshape a tree. Community is what allows us to persist. Back in the 1980s, teaching Apple leadership (which was by then getting to be a trendy way to think) we had a simple VIP model to help the young managers remember the key characteristics. The letters stood for Vision, Involvement, and Persistence. I think that maps to our topic today. Vision=Design. Involvement=Participation. Persistence=Community. This was Jim Koozes’ model before he published his more elaborated books on leadership. I think your titling for this talk, Craig and Patricia, is a wonderful update!

So I am a leader by virtue of facilitating people in co-designing futures and stories of their past and future. I get totally involved. And I am supported by wonderful communities like this and others I am involved with. So I would like to show you how this has appeared in my work and show you just how much a mountain man cum midwife from the Eastern Sierra can get away with.

( David then showed a series of slides from his facilitation of the Health East Quality Journey offsite held in the very room where the Thought Leaders were meeting, and culminated in a graphic map summarizing all the Quality initiatives inside Health East. He also shared large Storymaps™ for VISA, Saturn, National Semiconductor, and for a network of NGO’s and foundations in the upper Midwest working to clean up the energy system there. He concluded with some pages from highly illustrated journal.)

Questions for David

Craig: It is our custom to now ask our conversation starter some questions. Imagine that you could have dinner with David and could ask him any one question in the world. What would that question be. Write it down, and while we are meeting in Wisdom Circles, he will reflect on these questions and then our morning with a response.

These are the questions:

1. If you couldn’t speak, what would you say?
2. What do you think of the following: “Today’s MBA is an MFA.” Heard in a talk by a chief marketing officer for Hallmark Cards.
3. It sounds as if you entered this world with a multitude of gifts. How have you picked and chosen what gifts to develop? Is there one gift that has remained present in all stages?
4. Say more about the layers you see and work with as you illuminate the complexity of a situation/organization/etc. What’s in between the complexity and simplicity? What do you see consistently there?
5. What feeds your imagination? What is the well you go to?
6. Would you talk more about the spiritual dimension of your work and your father’s influence on that? So, what’s happening with creating a curriculum of design as a specialty or major cross-discipline focus area?
7. Why do people have such a hard time seeing thru systems?
8. How do you remind people of the importance/value of nature?
9. Let’s talk about overlapping/interpenetrating—hierarchies/systems/realms—and the holons i.e. hierarchies of gestalts.
10. Have you written about your visual representation technique anywhere where someone might be able to try to attempt a mini version with groups they work with? I’ve done a lot of work with traditional storytelling in organizations and would like to add this dimension somehow. Great talk.
11. How/when did you connect the dots and see the system of your life and work? How do you balance study, experience and entrepreneurial action? Thank you.
12. How often do you connect yourself to the energy of the system? What tools or practices do you employ (formally or informally)? On what leadership qualities do you rely? What are the universal symbols you rely on? What is the role of color in your work?
13. Who are the practitioners of creating inclusive ecological urban settlements? What are the emerging archetypes?
14. Is it really so complicated?
15. What is the methodology for design facilitator? Is there a template?
16. How did/does your artistry live in your parenting? What inspires you? The simple...
17. I can’t draw. Could I be a graphic facilitator?
18. Once you help them see the change they need to do, how do you help them live into this change?
19. How does your child make him and herself present in the moment of your work?
20. Talk to me about the role of love in organizational change, social entrepreneurship and social change.
21. What are the three things I can do/be that will help me, a beginner, move forward in “designing” my relationship in work and life.
22. Do you ever get annoyed that the grow folks (“leaders”) need so much help learning to listen to each other?
23. What has been your most memorable “leap of faith” (so far in life) that informs your heart each day as a midwife?
24. How would you draw the inner chuckle (that I’ve enjoyed throughout your talk)?
25. What is the role you see for artists in making “aphrodisiacs” to help us fall in love in time to make the shifts we need worldwide?
26. Why do fools fall in love? How have you created a container for awareness and love? What is your next pet “design” project?
27. What motivates you to do your work and how do you re-energize your spirit?
28. How can we access the classic patterns you’ve identified in your innovative work to help us novice practitioners advance the work?

29. What do you dream XX- if all obstacles were non-existent and the results?

30. How do you nurture your artistic side if you are in an environment that is not conducive to artistry or are not a particularly artistic person?

31. Midwives give courage to women in labor so a new life can emerge. What is the role of a midwife in the new life that is emerging for you and giving you courage?

32. Participation- can tend to be driven by hierarchy and tradition. How do you create the participation piece-talk/tell me more about this.

33. Tell me what it’s like living in a deep valley?

34. What was the flash of insight that allowed/opened you to see you were creating pictures of how systems connect?

35. What are the practices that keep you open to the possibilities and continual reinvention of yourself?

36. How do you reinvigorate/reinvent yourself within the same organization that you have been running for years?

37. How can I be a really good “internal designer” in a company that may not understand the concept?

38. How does your art and design “ask”? What is your process, thought-to-paper- do you envision, then follow, or do and evolve?

39. If you could reduce all the process skills to Meta skills of design facilitation, do you know what the most important ones are for leaders to regularly practice? Thanks David!

40. How have the lessons of your father’s ministry shaped who you are today?

41. How many people can create a vision, cross-ages, with children?

42. How do you draw the pictures of change, in a space where there are no pens or paper sometimes?

43. What do you see as an ecological community- your definition? How does government give up its role of governing- will that create chaos?

44. Once we have a picture or map, how do we communicate with the masses or others?

45. Tell me more about your view of the connection between art and science or in business terms, uncertainty and objectives. You called it design...

46. Speak more of governance/community vs. leadership/ relying on the individual?

47. How can others apply what you do? Is there a model? David in a box?

48. You seem like you’ve been on such an incredible journey… what more do you think you will learn or what do you want to learn?
49. How is your energy sustained? How do you create simplicity in all the chaos?

50. What word, pattern, symbol would/could replace the meaning/concept of leadership?

51. Nature is the church. How is nature guiding your processes/decisions in your work, your community? If changing systems is like changing a tree how can we teach patience?

52. How do you integrate sitting around the fire, in Africa or anywhere, with your second life explorations?

53. What is most meaningful for you today?

I liked the concept of art and science combined is design. When I work with people to be together better as teams, I’m designing. It is powerful.

As passionate as we may be for our own artistic expression, the community that we practice it in may not appreciate it. We can suffer chronic fatigue and burnout to stay in our truth. The work that we do for today is not for ourselves, but for seven generations from now. How do we stay on course when the tree grows slowly?

Church is community. I had no idea that I had come to church. This is church.

Boundaries. Harvard Business Review had an article about needing to bring back the structure of “the box”.

I was struck and inspired how in tuned people are to their lives.

I was struck by the different forms that artistry takes and how different it is from my second grade concept of art.

I was moved by how wonderful it felt to be heard.

Listen deeply, be present- put that on your cell phone.

When a ball dreams, it dreams of being a Frisbee.

If I look at the circle and all as artists, the consciousness level rises. The word “artistry” was bigger than I thought when I was younger.

Remember in kindergarten class when you were asked if you were an artist to raise your hand? What happened to that.
Love is essential to artistry. Speak love.

Own our artistic nature. What do I fear most that you will judge me negatively about—that is the thing that I don’t want to be judged about.

Ring the bells that still can ring, remember your perfect offering...remember the crack, that is how the light gets in.

How are we showing up as midwives and designers?

David Sibbet’s Response-
Speaking to the Richness of the Questions

(While the Thought Leader Gathering participants met in wisdom circles, David took all the questions and arrayed them like flower petals around the circular yin-yang centerpiece that Yogiraj Achala had created for the event, letting the questions resonate with the eight directions of the Medicine Wheel and the teaching of the Delicate Lodge which he has been learning from Firehawk Hulin. As a conclusion to the event, David provided a ten-minute response to the questions, transcribed here).

Craig begins: We have created a container here, and a container has boundaries, and one of the boundaries is that we have agreed to close at noon. We also agreed that one of the roles of the conversation starter is receive the questions and listen very deeply to what has been said in this community, and then speak back to us. The simple words are, “David what have you heard, and what are called to say?”

David: Inspired by Barbara I would like to start with a poem that consists of six letters.

\begin{align*}
\text{Hear, ear} \\
\text{Art!} \\
\text{Hear, ear, art, heart.} \\
\text{Heart} \\
\text{Earth} \\
\text{Hearth}
\end{align*}

I believe the answers to all of these questions are in us and in the system and in the world. I do not believe that independent people cook up answers as objects and then plug them into something. That is highly reductionist metaphor for our times. So I took the questions as a gift of wisdom. And in my practice, I take raw input and play it off against disciplined thinking and my practiced awareness, and let the interaction interact holographically. So I remember the raw input and I remember the discipline. But I don’t confuse the two. I don’t confuse the form with the thing. I don’t confuse language with the territory. I don’t confuse territory with spirit. I’m don’t even think you can talk about spirit. I’m a Sufi fan. If you want to talk about it don’t talk about it.

So your question (indicated one from a participant across the circle)

“\text{If you couldn’t speak, what would you say?”}

I’d invite you to read these cards placed around the wheel.

But since this is a talk, and since there are a few questions dealing with mind, I’ve clustered these based on my practice. I have come to be a
practicing Native American. I am an indigenous California. I actually relate to nature the way that Native Americans do. I walk the wheel every morning and tune myself to the eight directions.

Now I am standing here in the East, in the place of the Heyokah Chiefs, the place of the rising sun, the place of seeing the rising goodness in each person, the place of looking into the very heart of darkness to that pinpoint of light.

"What was the flash of insight that allowed/opened you to see you were creating pictures of how systems connect?"

I don’t know but I get flashes. And it comes when I think about this business of seeing layers in work where I see the situation and then everything in between, Vivi.

"What is in between?"

Nothing is in between. It is in the stillness that the dawn comes. So the spiritual inner girl for a man, and the spiritual inner boy for a woman, is a little being that can wake up if you just stop… and listen. So this is a mystery, freedom and creativity. The Heyokah Chiefs are the clowns, the disturbers. They are the ones who create cracks and allow the light in.

But the East is not the whole circle. In the journey of life you also need the Council Chiefs (and David moves clockwise to the SE). They are the ones who hold appreciation and they are the ones who hold awareness of the present condition. So there are questions here.

"Tell me what it is like living in a deep valley?"

"How can I draw and be a graphic facilitator."

"How does all this fit in parenting?"

"How do you do all these things?"

I start with appreciation of what is coming out of sunrise. And there is always material with which to create beauty. There are always answers. So I approach my children like that. I approach children with the glint of hope in my eyes. That is what they leap for. They don’t leap for me pretending they are the clay of my life, like my father did. I am well molded! But I have given him his rest. "Superego, you aren’t on the steering wheel any more." Appreciation and present condition...

(David moves south).

Ah I’m in the south now – adolescence – ahhh! Give me a little JUICE! Give me a group to make love with! Give me a dance! Give me a car! I will kill myself. I’m indestructible.

"What is the role you see for artists in making “aphrodisiacs” to help us fall in love in time to make the shifts we need worldwide?"

"How do you deal with love?"

You fall in love. Send your attention down to the lower chakras and it will all start happening. What gets your thighs quivering? What really juices you? Playing around juices people. Get them up, get them moving around, get them milling, get music, get them dancing, do all kinds of crazy stuff. There aren’t rules down here. This is power and danger. This is the place of
the War Chiefs. These are the people who know that people who don’t get to play kill each other—to FEEL.

We have a lot of numb tank commanders in charge of our companies. They have to have sex with their secretaries, drink a lot of booze, snort cocaine, grab power and merge, just to feel awake. They are little boys who don’t know what the kaka they are feeling. And us HR people are co-dependents with them. Snip the chord. Get THEM to play. Don’t you play. Don’t be a court jester on their nickel. Get THEM to dance. They can do it.

Now over here in the SW.

“How does your art and design “ask”? What is your process, thought-to-paper- do you envision, then follow, or do and evolve?”

“What is most meaningful for you, today?”

This is the land of the Medicine Singer Chiefs. These are the chiefs about purpose and direction. Adolescents don’t have a clue. They need a little elder help here. “This-away folks; take all that juice and move it up a little bit.” Start going into the dark of civilization, into having to give up your ego, give up some of your nice freedom over there in the East, and start dealing with what has purpose and direction. And ...

“How do you integrate sitting around the fire, in Africa or anywhere, with your Second Life explorations?”

If any of you have done sand tray therapy, Second Life is a digital sand tray of vast proportions. Since everything in there has been decided on by somebody you can choose to look at the decision maker rather than the made thing. And so for me, I’ve created a whole world—“The Grove.” You can get a little avatar and go in, searching for “The Grove.” There is a school up above. On another island we have Third Life where Firehawk and I and others do medicine work every Sunday night. What does that have to do with anything? It doesn’t have to do with anything other than finding purpose and direction, of seeing my decision maker reflected in choices of image, text, icon, and color.

So there are a bunch of questions here.

“How can I be a really good “internal designer” in a company that may not understand the concept?”

“Once we have a picture or map, how do we communicate with the masses or others?”

“How do you create simplicity in all the chaos?”

This (in the West) is the land of the Women Chiefs. It’s the land of maintenance and balance. It’s the setting sun. Its’ the place where you give up your ego in order to collaborate with the community. It’s the place of dreams, it’s the place of the deep river. And I think women are extraordinary in their understanding of form and the fact that that is not it. So they are language experts because they give birth. They know that babies aren’t words. They don’t have words for quite a while. But they talk in this beautiful language of biological sensibility.
So how do you do all this stuff. This is the place of the Peace Chiefs, the integrity and timing people. And these (in the North) are the Hunter/Worker Chiefs, the place of action and clarity.

"So how do you actually do it?"

"How do you draw the pictures of change, in a space where there are no pens or paper sometimes?"

"How many people can create a vision, cross-ages, with children?"

There is a very powerful discipline to this work, coming from thousands of years of indigenous practice as seeing the whole in the parts, one of which is the Medicine Wheel, another is Tantric Buddhism, which I practice; another is Arthur M. Young’s Theory of Process, which integrates physics and metaphysics. He gave me the geometric templates for my work. I’ve studied patterns. There is not much new under the sun when it comes to arranging symbols. There is just new media for doing it. Nature reflects these patterns. I’m a big fan of biomimicry, as described by Janine Benyus. I think that nature is the great library. When you begin studying the new biology, about what is going on, these patterns are all there. If you want to know more about these things look at www.davidsibbet.com, www.grove.com, and www.arthuryoung.com. They are loaded with intellectual content about archetypes.

Can you do it. Yes you can. Does this in the North do it without the rest? No.

"How is your energy sustained?"

"How do you reinvigorate/reinvent yourself within the same organization that you have been running for years?"

This in the NE is the place of the Law Dog Chiefs. Their role is to bring integrity and vitality. They are the ones who say “You know we have had a good discussion, but we haven’t got everything in here yet. We haven’t talked about the seventh generation yet. We haven’t talked about having compassion for the people in power who know they have _____d up. We haven’t talked about the vulnerability of power. We haven’t talked about having compassion for the people who don’t have any feeling. We haven’t talked about the excesses of people who think you have to be huggy-feely all the time and never think. We haven’t talked about what is enough. So let’s go around again!”

Ahhh, the dawn— the beauty—the power—the direction—the maintenance, the holding—the timing and interrelatedness—the action—the vitality.

I have spoken.

(Please recall that David was walking the wheel during this portion of the Thought Leader Gathering, dancing out his thinking as well as speaking).

Following this response some people asked David for a little more about his work. He replied.

You get to a point where on a Tuesday I’m in Detroit listening to Bill Ford explore what it means to be chairman of Ford Motor company, along with a
life-long friend who has got me in there to do this, and was very humbled by this experience, and three days later I’m with the Burning Man organization, trying to figure out how to get the Burners Without Borders to work with the Black Rock Foundation and the Regional Burners. Last week I was working with a mid-sized cookie company, in between two jobs with Nike.

My dear friend Michael Noble, here from RE-AMP, is part of a project involving 67 non-government organizations collaborating with 8 foundations to clean up the energy system in the upper Midwest. Why? Because, if this area gets on the bandwagon to do something about global warming it could tip the whole country politically. We started four years ago and our focus groups said they didn’t think global warming was going on and didn’t think about it much. I facilitated four parallel strategy groups to clean up coal, stop new coal, start energy efficiency, and increase renewables. Michael led one of the groups as the head of Fresh Energy here in Minneapolis.

Well, a lot has happened. This November 16 five governors signed an accord to cap carbon in this region and in most cases have empowered task forces to study this problem. The RE-AMP people are meeting in circle, and ending their annual meetings in circle. They are swarming this subject, like bees on honey, and the politicians are starting to give voice to the messages. Can we stop global warming? I don’t know. But I do know that getting 67 NGOs collaborating with 8 foundations is something. If you know foundations this is not what they do. You have to see these RE-AMP people though. They are starting to fall in love with each other. And when loves starts happening, you can melt the snow.

Resources

Janine Benyus, Biomimicry - Nature as Model, Measure and Mentor.


Arthur Young, http://www.arthuryoung.com

David Sibbet’s websites: www.davidsibbet.com and www.grove.com