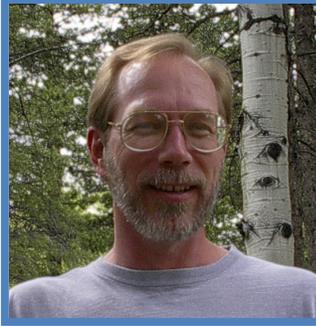


I Brought My Soul To Work



by Jay E. Valusek with reflections by Circle of Trust® Facilitator Paul Michalec

Paul As a Circle of Trust Facilitator, the observations of the poet Marge Piercy have a certain resonance: "Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground. You cannot tell always by looking what is happening." I sit in a circle, inviting participants to encounter a deeper sense of self, not really knowing what might be growing inside the soul. Shortly after a recent retreat, a participant (Jay Valusek) sent the circle the following email. Now I know a little of "what was happening" and nurtured into life through the mysteries of a Circle of Trust.

Jay I'd like to share a story with all of you about what happened immediately after our Circle of Trust retreat last week. I decided to bring my soul to work.

I am a freelance writer for high-tech companies, mostly in the oil industry. Not a place my soul gets much nurture. One of my clients is the CEO of a software company, for whom I write speeches. The day after I returned from the retreat, I was faced with a serious problem: I had two days to write his speech for a major event and I couldn't reach him on the phone. When I finally made contact, he spent an hour talking vaguely about innovation and customer collaboration. Not much substance at all. Afterward, I called the woman in charge of the event. I told her that I didn't think I could pull any rabbits out of the hat this time. By day's end, I still had no idea what to do...and only one day left to write the speech. However, because of the time we spent together on retreat, I decided to let my challenge sit overnight and trust whatever arose from the "abundance" within.

Awakening early Friday morning, I went for a slow walk around a lake, determined simply to enjoy the beauty of the moment and not to obsess about the speech. As I walked, an idea appeared out of nowhere. A crazy idea. But it stuck and I liked it. I went home and pulled out my copy of *Leading From Within--Poems to Inspire the Courage to Lead* and a book of poetry by David Whyte.

"Nah," I told myself. "It'll never work." I mean, this is a CEO in the oil business, who will be standing in front of industry journalists and editors and a couple hundred of his own customers—geoscientists from companies like Chevron and Exxon-Mobil. But I couldn't shake off my soul. It had come out of hiding, as Parker Palmer says. So I just sat quietly at my keyboard watching it do its thing...all day.

By the end of the day, I had written the entire speech, incorporating the best of the CEO's random ideas into a framework held together by poetry! I sent it off to my contact in the company, told her what had happened during my creative process, and said I had no idea if the CEO would go for my wacky idea. But I had nothing else to offer, and no time to start over.

I was really worried. This gentleman is a scientist by training, lives on a ranch, and speaks with a sharp East Texas twang. He's anything but artsy. But he's clever, too. I know he has often lectured on ethics, and actually did stand-up comedy long ago. I gulped and told my contact I'd brush up my resume while I waited to hear back...

Well, she loved the speech. She took it to the Director of Marketing, and she loved it too. So they rushed into the CEO's office, and told him he had to do the speech whether he liked it or not! He read it out loud on the spot, and decided he would do it. I hear he spent the weekend rehearsing. Today, just after he delivered the speech, I received an email from the high-powered PR consultant who arranged the media event. She said it went beautifully. Oh, and here's the punch line. This hard-driving PR executive especially loved the closing poem: "I can't get the image of that dented cup out of my mind!" she said. Yeah, that's right. Not only did I have this CEO open with a poem by David

Whyte (see below), but I had him close by quoting the opening lines of John Fox's poem, "When Someone Deeply Listens to You"—a poem taken straight from our retreat!

I don't think I'd have had the nerve to do this if I had allowed a week to go by, writing the usual stuff (which tends to bore my soul). But the deep listening of our time together encouraged me not to leave my soul at the door. I brought it to work and let it sing. What a rewarding experience! I see now that it's possible—if I keep listening to my Inner Teacher—to redeem my usual roles, and to "live divided no more," as Parker puts it.

"Working Together"

by David Whyte (*River Flow: New & Selected Poems*, 2007)

We shape our self
to fit this world

and by the world
are shaped again.

The visible
and the invisible

working together
in common cause,

to produce
the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way
the intangible air

traveling at speed
round a shaped wing

easily
holds our weight.

So may we, in this life
trust

to those elements
we have yet to see

or imagine,
and look for the true

shape of our own self,
by forming it well

to the great
intangibles about us.

Paul For me, three learnings about Circles of Trust reside at the center of Jay's story. One, a reminder of our touchstone that people are inherently whole and lacking only quiet spaces to hear the soul's calling into acts of authenticity. Two, an affirmation that in the silence and stillness of retreat, much is going on that can't/shouldn't be named but is destined to emerge into flight—at its own time and place. Three, the viability of our work beyond the more commonly known circles of educators, clergy, health care workers, and school leaders. Jay's story invites me to consider a wider range of venues

and participants who might welcome the challenge and opportunity of bringing their “soul to work,” and changing the world of business-as-usual in their own heart-felt way.

When Someone Deeply Listens To You

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

— John Fox