

## Our Inner Muse: The Wind Beneath Our Wings

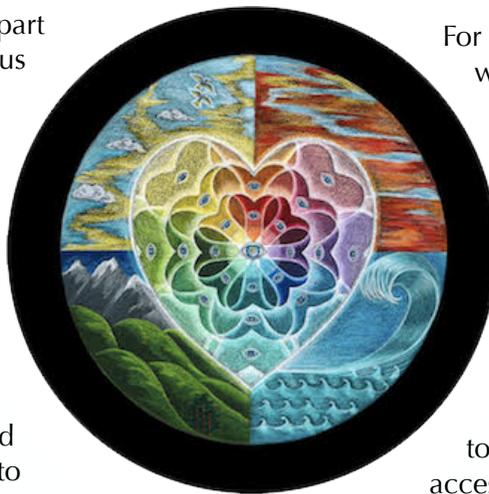
Four years ago, after completing a complex and protracted process to write my dissertation I found myself changed, looking at the world and approaching my work differently. The inner impulse that guided me through nine years of a labyrinth-like research and writing process continued to work through me as I sought to apply the dissertation findings to my daily work. My dissertation was titled "The Leader's Muse: An Exploration of How Artistic Sensibilities Inform Organizational Leadership." Its primary revelation suggested that there is within each of us a source of creativity, wisdom, and compassion. When nurtured, fed, and encouraged to be part of our daily lives this source enables us to lead a deeply authentic, enriched and meaningful life. I call this source our Inner Muse.

There is a reason the word "muse" is linked to the word "amuse" and "museum". Our muse wants to play, dance, sing, and paint our way artfully through life. She's happy and joyful and delights in all that life offers. She feels the depth and breadth of her experiences and longs to fully experience each moment while expressing herself in carefree and genuine ways. She's the more expansive part of us that unfortunately gets dominated and silenced by the constrictive tendencies of our personality and inner critic.

Similar to the nine muses in Greek mythology, our inner muse is the creative feminine force in us all – women and men – a resourceful impulse that can bring out our best and help us bring out the best in others. With her wisdom and playful guidance she provides a fresh lens to view the world, to unveil previously hidden information. She inspires us to approach our life differently, to live more joyfully, wisely, creatively, and lovingly. She enables us to see beauty where we previously missed it while sparking our imagination and setting us in pursuit of excellence. As the late Angeles Arrien, a powerful

influence on my life, beautifully said, "The muses are about trusting our deepest nature and authentically expressing who we are in the world in wise and life-affirming ways."

Our muse lives deep in the forest of our inner terrain, waiting to be set free. In some cases she may be patiently awaiting our return to her, in other cases she may be clamoring wildly for her freedom. In either case, to ignore her, to allow her to lie dormant, is to invite a less than meaningful existence at best and a disastrous struggle at worst.



For the executives and leaders I engage with, not pursuing this muse can have dire consequences, some which are more readily apparent than others. Either way, one result of ignoring her call is settling for less than our best self.

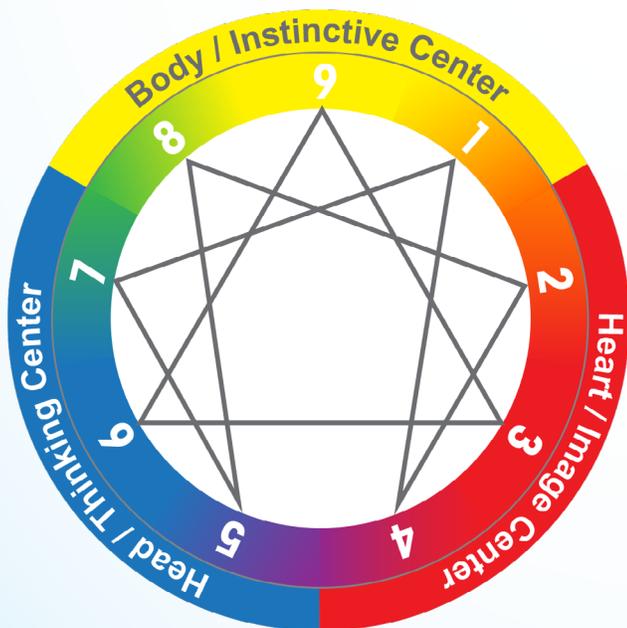
Two questions most executives pose regarding the muse is: "How does the muse fit in with the values and needs of today's workplace?" And: "If there is a benefit she brings to our work lives, then how do we access our muse?"

Fortunately both answers are relatively simple.

The first question asks: What is the muse's benefit to our work as organizational leaders – how does her presence enable us to be better leaders? In some ways this is quite apparent and in others it is more indirect. In a most straightforward way, the muse's influence enables us to be more innovative: to see connections among divergent elements that were invisible before, to sense what's emerging before it's available to common understanding, and to generate unexpected new possibilities. In a nutshell, to see and respond to opportunities and challenges earlier and more creatively than our personality is capable of doing. In a more indirect way, the muse enables us to connect more intimately with new and powerful parts of ourselves, others and the world around us.

She promotes a greater sense of relatedness. And thus we find ourselves listening in an improved way, being more empathetic, relational, inclusive, collaborative, able to manage conflict, and appreciate differences. In short, the muse enables us to foster an environment of collective wisdom.

The second question asks: If our muse lurks so deep in our unconscious, in places not known to us, how do we awaken her? A multitude of ways exist for awakening our muse, most of which will feel basic and elementary yet novel and unfamiliar. They require an open mind, deep curiosity, and the willingness to approach this work as a journey of discovery and exploration. New practices are required to rewire our brains for engaging differently with life around us, for seeing what we were blind to, for hearing what we were deaf to. Self-observation muscles need to be strengthened for paying attention to nuanced internal reactions that trigger a chain reaction of habitual thinking, feeling and acting. We also need to develop new ways of attuning to the world around us that stirs our heart and brings it to life. We need to learn new languages that enable us to hear the wisdom of our heart and body. We need interventions to quiet the incessant mental chatter of the mind that causes anxiety and distracts us from fully and directly experiencing the moment. These practices, and the capacities they provide, open pathways for making fresh choices; they untether us from old stories, the voice of our inner critic and habits that no longer serve us. These practices awaken the muse who guides us to live and lead wholeheartedly.



In each issue of *The Leader's Muse Chronicles* we'll discuss strategies for awakening and nurturing our muse. For the remainder of this initial article we will focus on introducing a tool that supports us on our path toward arousing our muse: The Enneagram. While I have been working with the Enneagram for 20 years, I truly fell in love with it only after my transformative experience in writing my dissertation. Three years ago, during my initial involvement with the Deep Coaching Institute (DCI), I felt a strong resonance between DCI's approach to the Enneagram and my *Leader's Muse* work. It was a surprising insight. Although I had been working with Roxanne Howe-Murphy's *Deep Coaching* book for many years, it was only after the *Leader's Muse* lens was fully crafted that I could appreciate aspects of the Enneagram that were previously unavailable to me.

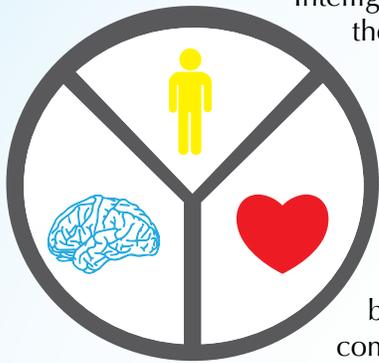
The Enneagram is an ancient tool with modern applications. Its insights into our deeper truth enables us to more clearly know huge parts of ourselves that were formerly unknown. This is a big statement, but used 'properly' it can change our relationship with ourselves, with who we think we are, and in doing so with the world around us. Used 'properly' it can help us awaken and befriend our muse; to invite her to join us on our journey through everyday life.

Used in this way, the Enneagram is a tool for attunement to our inner experience, a world we are unaccustomed to noticing and skillfully working with. Depending on which of the nine Enneagram types we are dominant in, we will share certain inner personality tendencies, as well as untapped virtues, with others of our type. Our aim is to notice and unhinge from our deeply ingrained personality tendencies and thereby move from constrictive to expansive states of being – states that make room for the muse to get engaged.

While the idea of noticing and unhinging from our reactive personality tendencies is a simple premise, the actual embodied change requires a deliberate intentionality far beyond an intellectual endeavor. It requires us to move out of our comfort zone and often into tender vulnerable territory that is difficult to reside in without the right support. Once we begin awakening our muse, she can be a source of immense courage and strength; but until that point, it is necessary to ensure we are surrounded by encouraging people and infuse our life with practices that support this journey. Being part of a learning community or ecosystem with a shared purpose of awakening our muse is immensely valuable.

A significant offering of the Enneagram entails understanding and working with the Three Centers of

Intelligence: the intelligence of the open heart, clear mind, and sharp instincts. Most of us tend to unconsciously overuse, underuse, or be completely out of touch with one or more of these centers. This imbalance is an expression of our being caught in the compulsive and habitual reactions of the personality. For



instance, people dominant in Type 8 tend to over-utilize their instinctual energy, while Type 5's tend to over-utilize their intellectual center, and Type 2's tend to over-utilize their emotional center. Yet, when each of these types learns to access the center they least utilize, it brings their use of the three centers into greater balance: when 8's learn to access the tenderness of the heart center, when 5's gain greater access to the body-based groundedness of their instinctual center, when 2's gain access to the inner guidance of the quiet mind. Strategies for accomplishing this feat of gaining access to our least utilized center are highly variable as each person is a unique expression of their type. A common factor among these strategies however, as well as the results they produce, is they help awaken and sustain our muse. This is because all of these strategies involve an element of unhinging from our automatic reactions and replacing them with a more presence-based orientation, a place our muse delights in.

When these centers are used in a balanced way, they enable greater presence – the ability to more fully and freshly experience what is presented in the moment and to more fully and freshly respond to what we experience. We discover an enhanced way of engaging with the world. We enter the world of the muse.

As you probably suspect, there is a multitude of layers to the Enneagram and gaining proficiency with its usage requires a long period of devoted study. That said, part of this wisdom tool's beauty is it can offer insights and transformative advantages from the outset. For those interested in beginning this quest, the adjacent column offers three basic practices to ignite a healthy relationship with our three centers of intelligence and thereby engage our muse.

## Be Curious

Approach life as a journey of discovery and exploration – an adventure. Be fascinated by what's happening and what may happen next. If and when you have difficulty doing this:

- Start by noticing the noise of mental activity that is occurring in your mind: the stream of thoughts, anxieties, and stories that squeeze out curiosity.
- Notice the tone and messages conveyed through this mental activity – the fears about your own deficiencies or about threats in the environment – and your mental strategies to justify or defend.
- Notice how “just noticing” the mental activity creates a slight pause and distance from the thoughts' clutch. Imagine how this pause can be expanded to provide greater space and more choice than what you're currently experiencing.

## Be Kind

Soften your heart to yourself, and by natural extension to others. Allow yourself to feel a sense of love, acceptance, gentleness, and even playfulness. If and when you have difficulty doing this:

- Start by noticing when you're not being kind, get in contact with the subtle ways you may be judging and criticizing yourself and others.
- Notice what you're paying attention to in this state.
- Next, without judgment, bring your attention inward and simply notice what's going on in your heart: How does your heart feel? To what degree does it feel open or closed?
- Bring your attention to your solar plexus in the middle of your chest – the core of our heart center – what difference do you notice simply by bringing your attention there?

## Be Truthful

Curiosity and kindness support us in being truthful. It takes courage to be truthful, foremost with ourselves, and then with others. A commitment to truthfulness is often accompanied by an experience of vulnerability. It can feel quite risky. If and when you have difficulty doing this:

- Bring your attention to your body and your felt sense of what is going on. In what part of your body do you notice something happening? Where do you feel sensations of tension, constriction or discomfort? (Often these are very subtle movements so pay close attention).
- Tune into your body's message...what feels true or untrue? This somatic assessment is very different than an intellectual understanding; notice how the intellect or the inner critic tries to answer your inquiry; gently ask them to step aside, then return your attention to information provided by your body.
- Seek information about how your body speaks to you. (It is always speaking to us but we often discount, ignore or cannot discern its message). Simply bringing our attention to our physical sensations can elicit valuable new information.

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## About Ipek Serifsoy, PhD



For the past 20 years Ipek has been an executive coach and organizational consultant for leaders and their teams in large companies. In addition to her own coaching and consulting practice she is also the President of The Deep Coaching Institute, an advanced coach training school. Prior to her work developing leaders, Ipek was an investment banker on Wall Street for almost 10 years after which she made a career transition to her current work. This transition was facilitated by a year-long sabbatical during which she attended New York Theological Seminary. Ipek completed both her Masters in Psychology and her PhD in Organizational Systems at Saybrook University. She lives in Mill Valley with her husband and daughter.

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“The most beautiful thing we can experience  
is the mysterious.  
It is the source of all true art and science.”  
- Albert Einstein

*The Leader's Muse Chronicles is an offspring of Ipek's doctoral dissertation, married together with her fieldwork as an executive coach and organizational consultant, her work with The Deep Coaching Institute and Women's Leadership Circles. It brings together the feminine, creativity, artistry, spirituality, nature, psychology, communication, and the Enneagram to help us find joy and wellness that restores our soul, that frees us to operate from our 'best self.' Its purpose is to help us have a richer, more satisfying experience of life, and engage with the world around us in more intelligent and compassionate ways.*



*Gratitude to the artists contributing to the beauty of this article.  
Candida Maurer for the use of her beautiful transformational mandalas.  
Regan McNeill-Ural for her design expertise and talent.*

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