

Moving from Diversity to Unity

The world is changing in rapid and unpredictable ways. Organisations that were once confident and assured of their own success, are now working hard to develop the flexibility to remain competitive and strategic in quickly changing circumstances. The diversity within organisations is also growing at an unparalleled rate. **Gone are the days of working with people who shared our same outlook, values, beliefs, and attitudes.** We now find ourselves working longer hours and under more pressure with people whom we understand less. Within any typical work group, it is now common to find people with significant differences in age, race, cultural background, nationality, and life experiences. Therefore it is critical that we learn to build connections and establish trust with people who have different life experiences, values and ideas.

As the diversity within organisations increases over the next twenty years, some organisations will create a significant business advantage by knowing how to foster relationships that generate confidence and rapport among diverse individuals and groups. Other organisations will fail, but not because they haven't tried. Much of the diversity work we see carried out in organisations today is focused almost entirely on peoples' differences. This approach often creates more barriers than it breaks down. **In *Creating the Energy of Connection*, we are moving the focus from what separates us to what connects us.** More than just a change in focus, it is a complete paradigm shift, a shift vital in making diversity work. Unity and connection are powerful experiences that bring us all closer to the essence of what it means to be human. Moreover, the field of quantum physics provides significant evidence that reality is not about separateness, but is in fact an intricate interplay of conscious intention and the interconnectedness of all things. According to the renowned quantum physicist David Bohm, "Unity and connectedness are key underlying principles of the universe."

Quantum Physics (also called the New Science) is beginning to show us that the nature of the universe is constant change, and that who we are in any given moment is ever changing. Like all particles of nature, we too are never the same from one dynamic moment to the next. In fact, the stability of all nature depends on the abilities of its members to change. Margaret Wheatly, author of *Leadership and the New Science* writes, "Strangely, the system maintains itself only if change is occurring somewhere in it all the time. New food sources, new neighbours, new talents appear. As conditions change, individuals experiment with new possibilities. If they fail to respond, the entire system suffers. An individual incapable of changing may disappear. Its demise will affect lives everywhere in the web."

Quantum Physics also demonstrates that the blueprint for all of life is continuous relationship. We live in a relational world. Every tree, plant, animal, cell or organic compound needs to be in relationship to something else in order to survive and thrive. Nothing can exist alone. How we as individuals **choose** to be in relationship with each other is also essential. We

make a choice as to what kind of relationships we want to create. Do we create healthy, nourishing relationships that elicit positive energy and opportunities for connections, or do we continue to fall back on reactive perceptions that constrict the flow of energy and possibility? Issues of diversity either push us forward into new arrangements for collaboration, or hold us back, because of our own discomfort with change and the unfamiliar.

The global workplace offers fertile ground to establish a new blueprint for change in human relationships. Everyday there are opportunities to **not** let the patterns of our past dictate our present behaviour. Those who choose to can explore the possibilities of human connection and authentic dialogue. **By entering into diversity with a conscious intention to truly exchange meaning with another human being unlike ourselves, we sow the seeds for the hope and growth of our planet.**

Much of the current training in diversity misses this opportunity for transformation. Focusing on people's differences places the spotlight on what is **not** common among us, and keeps the dialogue on a surface and intellectual level. This level doesn't provide individuals with a clear set of tools to create new patterns in relationships with others, because it does not provide individuals with the tools for creating new patterns within themselves.

In any dialogue on diversity, it is essential that we discuss and make known our differences - our different life experiences, viewpoints, values and ideas are essential parts of ourselves. Yet, how are we to develop authentic connections and create shared meaning with the emphasis on what is separate about us? As with any beautiful object we might create, like a chair, we can admire the intricacies of the carving on the back, the shape of the legs, or the polish of the wood; but what keeps the whole thing together is the glue - which is invisible. Similarly, in moving from diversity to unity, we need a connector. **The invisible glue that connects the diversity among us is imbedded in the tools and strategies of *Creating The Energy of Connection*.**

In order to successfully *Create The Energy of Connection*, there are five skill areas that we need to acquire. Each of these skill areas are developed in more detail throughout the remaining chapters of the book:

- Perceiving the world differently
- Creating new patterns
- Assuming positive intent
- Offering ourselves differently
- We are the people we've been waiting for

This new set of skills and tools is based on the notion that the individual is the one who must continually find within them a new vision of the world. It is about awakening within ourselves the desire to go past what on the surface seems like a justifiable reason for shutting down or cutting someone off. When an encounter becomes difficult, it is easy to forget that we **do** have a choice to go beyond our conditioning and need for control. **But out of our**

fear, we often forego the opportunity to actually learn from another person who is different from ourselves. Instead, we end up defending our opinions in order to “be right,” rather than listening to ideas and points of view that could take us to a deeper level of appreciation for someone else’s experience. We then justify these defensive actions by telling ourselves the problem lies with the other person and their shortcomings. David Whyte, the poet and author of the *Heart Aroused*, brilliantly captures a moment when the possibility for a new connection and a new way to see a person is bypassed in favor of a desire for the familiar. He writes:

“Just the very moment we attempt to take a step in the right direction with a colleague, initiate a conversation, write a difficult memo, or take the first few steps in a new direction, we can suddenly feel that the chasm is insurmountable and the bridge we had hoped to cross is down.”

Diversity, by its very nature calls on us to create the connection when it isn’t comfortable, when our best self isn’t readily available -or worse - when we are already angry or mistrusting of a person or group because of past experiences. This is when the work of creating connections must be done with a new set of assumptions, skills and tools. In *Creating the Energy of Connection*, we focus, not only on being open to others in order to create positive energy, but also on how each of us individually creates the energy that will enable us to be courageous, go beyond our fear, and create new possibilities in our relationships with others by being new in our relationship with ourselves.

Creating the Energy of Connection is about having an intentional relationship with ourselves – a relationship that creates the space for our interactions to be different because *we are different*. As individuals, we are the generators of the energy in any relationship. **Our choices, ideas, beliefs and needs enter into our encounters with others whether we are conscious of them or not.**

Creating the Energy of Connection is based on the notion that new possibilities emerge when we change *our perception of who we are*. Embedded in the five skill areas is the notion that perception is a powerful determinant of our experience. Nothing truly changes when we let our past behavior patterns determine our actions in the present. Diversity work means learning to look within our selves to discover who we truly are, and what it is that drives our own perception.

| Understanding diversity while discovering these dynamics within our selves creates a diversity journey - a journey that takes us beyond the common and the ordinary because in its fullest expression, it takes us beyond ourselves.

Each of the remaining chapters provides a number of simple, straightforward ideas and techniques that assist in the process of learning to successfully *Create the Energy of Connection*. These are called Key Tasks and follow each chapter’s main ideas. By practicing these Key Tasks, individuals will

discover how to creatively manage their assumptions and biases while creating positive energy for themselves. The miracle is that by implementing only **one** of the Key Tasks it is possible to bring about transformational change in yourself **and** in the situation. With the ability to go past their biases, a wealth of positive energy is made available, and individuals can embrace diversity in their organisations and in their personal lives.

From Diversity to Unity is accompanied by a workbook – Creating the Energy of Connection – which will help people to implement the Key Tasks in the book.

Book available on Amazon – workbook available from Geraldine directly.