

Foreword

*Thank God our time is now when wrong comes up to meet us everywhere,
never to leave us till we take the longest stride a soul folk ever took.*

—Christopher Fry

You are now holding a book that is remarkable for at least three reasons. One is the men who wrote it, two is the way they wrote it, and three is because of the time in which it is written.

Stephen and Paul are what poet John O'Donohue would call *anam cara*, soul friends. They have known each other for over twenty years, but rarely do they engage in small talk. There is between them a palpable energy that is stronger than either one of them alone. The closest I can come to describing it is what Martin Luther King Jr. would call “soul force.” If you were to eavesdrop on them in the front seat of a car, you would most likely be drawn into what I call a “conversation of discovery.” One of them asks the other a beautiful, open question, the kind that cannot be answered and causes you to think deeply. Instead of asking each other about the stock market or how much money they are making, one of them more likely would ask, “Have you ever thought about what is your real wealth?” This is followed by a long and hungry silence. Each listens to himself as well as to the space between them. You find yourself breathing a bit deeper, your chest opening, your periphery expanding, as you wonder with them.

At exactly the right moment, one of them responds with a story from his life. It doesn't answer the question at all but rather embraces it, exploring the way you would find your way through the Maze at Chartres. That story evokes another one in the listener, then one in you, then another question unfurls until you have the delicious feeling of inclusion I can only call resonance. It is

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as if you have stepped onto a raft being drawn by a powerful current down a river which flows between two lush banks.

Stephen and Paul met while they were attending a professional seminar at Harvard University. They were both superintendents of school at the time. While you might assume that educational leaders would be ardent learners, in my experience, the opposite is often true. Most of us who teach have forgotten how to learn, and seminars at Harvard are more often places where people show off their mastery rather than environments for exploring the mystery of life. When Paul and Stephen met, two very different men from very different backgrounds, they sat on those opposite banks and found the passion of their lives joining in a river of spirit flowing between them, drawing them forward.

To truly appreciate them as well as this book, you have to be willing to dig down beneath the surface of things. Let's explore, therefore, the roots of the words we're using to describe them and their work. The origin of the word *professional* is *profiteri*, which means an avowal of faith or belief. The root of the word *educate* is *educare*, which means to draw out that which is within. The root of the word *to lead* is *laithjan*, which means to cause to go on one's journey. The word *spiritual* was derived from *spirare*, to breathe. The word *principle* was derived from *principe*, which means foundation. These two soul folk are involved—and want to involve you—in professing your faith in those who share the journey with you, finding the foundations that will enable you to draw out the best of that which is within by inspiring, aspiring, and conspiring together.

The third remarkable thing about this book is that it's written now, in a time of rigidity and fragmentation when we're all victims of the blame game, which puts us on opposite sides and polarizes us through either/or thinking. Along come these two very different men who ask each other questions that lead us toward solutions large enough to hold all perspectives; questions that can help us individually and collectively live, as author Parker Palmer would say, divided no more.

Most educators today feel suffocated under the rigidity of the standardized testing requirements that measure today's children by yesterday's standards for tomorrow's world. We are dividing the world into two opposing camps—the parents versus the teachers, the superintendents versus the school board members, those that have versus those that don't, the successes versus the failures.

Between these polarities is an abyss that grows deeper and wider day by day. Our children's future is perishing in that abyss. In the rampant fear that is being fostered in all of this uncertainty, we cling to the belief that a leader is someone who is certain. In these terrorized times, we have forgotten how to think for ourselves, how to design our way out of trouble—a phenomenon that arises from honoring each person's unique difference and capacity to imagine new possibilities.

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The conversations Stephen and Paul have been engaged in for the last two decades—the open questions and musings and principles that are the foundation of this book—have created a bridge across the abyss. Out of mutual respect for their differences, as well as an honoring of the spirit of their shared values, they have transformed the noun *leadership* into the verb *leading*, drawing out the best that is within each one of us.

Both of the authors of this book have been leaders at the top of their field of education. In a storm, the top of a tree is the most dangerous place to hang out. You will be buffered and besieged, which is exactly what many of today's educational leaders are experiencing. In such a storm, it is necessary to crawl down to safety, down to the trunk of the tree, where you have something strong you can hold onto. Paul and Stephen do that by guiding us down to the principles and values that we can hang onto in the strongest winds until we find the stability we need to risk crossing to explore the other bank.

When I first saw the manuscript of this book, I thought, “Oh great, another fluffy-wuffy California spiritual treatise. How can this be relevant to me, as I work with children who come to school with rat bites on their faces and with parents who are deployed in Iraq and with teachers who have to falsify test scores so funding won't be taken away from their students? I am too busy to be bothered reading such a thing.”

I had met Paul and Stephen a year before when they asked me to give a keynote speech at the yearly conference of AASA. I was reluctant. School administrators can be the most difficult audience to speak to—the image of thousands of arms tightly crossed over thousands of chests chokes me into silence. I went to dinner with them. I listened to these two friends talk, not about football scores or their golf game but about what could be possible for children if we all came together on their behalf. I left the restaurant feeling as if the ice that had made my own thinking rigid for decades was melting in the warmth of the “yes tunnel” that existed between them.

In case you don't know, a “yes tunnel” is a transformative moment of meeting. It is one where the connection between two people is present focused, noncritical, and fertile. Think of when you crouch in front of a 10-month-old baby and put out your arms, encouraging her to walk forward. Think of when you fell in love for the first time and, as Parker Palmer would say, “listened the other into speech.” Neuroscientists are asserting that we are, in fact, hardwired to connect in this way, and when we do, the brain can make new synaptic connections and possibly differentiate stem cells into new neurons. In other words, creating “yes tunnels” between each other can help all of us to grow new possibilities that are larger than our problems and wide enough to bridge the abyss that lies between “either/or.”

Enfolded in one of Paul and Stephen's “yes tunnels,” I agreed to give that keynote address. They sat in the front row, eagerly leaning forward, pulled by

their passion to learn, listening me into speech. It was that which drew me to actually read the manuscript of this book with an open mind. Ironically, I have recently moved to California because I could no longer breathe at Utah's altitude without an oxygen leash. Now I live in this fluffy-wuffy land of vineyards and oceans, and I breathe fully and freely. Breath has become all-important to me. Breath, *spirare*, spirit.

I am deeply moved and surprised by what I have read in these pages. It is not fluffy or wuffy. It is grounded in the practical wisdom of two men who have lived and are learning how to bring out the best in themselves and in others. It inspires me. It helps me let go of the limiting thoughts and beliefs in my mind that should have expired long ago. It includes me in a conspiracy that shifts the conversation from "What is the matter with our children, our school system, our teachers, our organizations, and our country?" to "What really matters about our children, our school systems, our teachers, our organizations, and our country?"

It is my delight and honor to introduce you to these two men, to this book, and to this remarkable "yes tunnel." May it help all of us create a bridge to a possible future for our children.

—Dawna Markova