
Archetypes & Leadership Coaching

Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth*, explains that Jungian Archetypes come from below, the ground, the unconscious, and not from above—ideas, the conscious. They are a particular energy experienced and expressed in every culture throughout time—found in the stories, art, myths, literature, and religion uniquely told within each culture’s particular experience, yet evoking a universal experience.

These archetypes live in us and we live in them. The ways we understand and experience archetypes relates to our own culture and subculture – how we recognize and come to know the various universal names for what initially felt like our own private, unique experiences. Some common archetypes are the Lover, Warrior, Magician, Sovereign, Trickster, Seeker, and Destroyer. Different people call them by slightly different names. People may actively use four or twenty four.

Carol Pearson, in *Awakening the Heroes Within* (pp.6-7), found at least five different ways to explain archetypes. Below are those explanations in slightly condensed form:

1. “Spiritual seekers may conceive of archetypes as gods and goddesses, encoded in the collective unconscious, whom we scorn at our own risk.
2. “Academics or other rationalists, who typically are suspicious of anything that sounds mystic, may conceive of archetypes as controlling paradigms or

metaphors, the invisible patterns in the mind that control how we experience the world.

3. “Scientists may see archetypes as being similar to holograms [and fractals] and the process of identifying them as similar to other scientific processes. An entire hologram is contained in any of its parts.
4. “People who are committed to religious positions that emphasize one God (and who worry about the polytheism inherent in any consideration of gods and goddesses) can distinguish the spiritual truth of monotheism from the pluralistic psychological truth of archetypes. The archetypes are like different facets of that God, accessible to the psyche’s capacity to imagine numinous [spiritually or divine] reality.
5. “Finally, people who are interested in human growth and development may understand the archetypes as guides on our journeys. Each archetype that comes into our lives brings with it a task, a lesson, and ultimately a gift. The archetypes together teach us how to live. And the best part about it is that all the archetypes reside in each of us. That means we all have this full human potential within us.”

When coaching executives and leaders at all levels, their particular choice of language is a window into the

construction of their world. Their language reflects the perspectives they hold and reveals the types of words they use for making distinctions. By judiciously introducing archetypal language and concepts, and noting the reaction of the leader, a coach can sense whether an archetypal framework will work. For others, using scientific, spiritual, religious, or human growth language may better convey archetypal content.

Whatever perspective presented through the leader's language, the coach has openings for talking about the ways archetypal content is at play in our lives. The point here is to use archetypal awareness to describe and frame distinct energies as well as their confluence, aiding in one's interpretation of life. And, archetypes may help the leader notice patterns of behavior that add up to an understandable story that has direction—providing order to disparate behaviors. This may help them transcend the limits of their present story and embrace a fuller expression of their human story—with its polarities: setbacks and accomplishments, suffering and joy, good and evil, failures and triumphs. Archetypes help leaders grasp more of the whole experience of life. When holding archetypes in daily awareness, they animate a sense of dynamic centeredness—like a spinning gyroscope advancing along a string. And they let the individual sense when there is a loss of centeredness, a blurring of lines, when life becomes distorted, fragmented, and disoriented.

“...The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart, the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity...”

Those lines from William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming," written at the onset of World War I with the unleashing of fascism in the world, invite reflection about *what holds things together* and *what is at the center*—of an individual, a class of students and a teacher, a community, a culture, a nation, an ecosystem, the world.

What is at *your* center, as an individual? What makes up your center? When you lose it, what do you lose? When you experience being in it, what is it that you are experiencing? When a community has it or loses it—what is it that is gained or lost? What is the glue that holds us together within and between ourselves, and with nature?

Perhaps **Fernando Flores**, Minister of Finance in the Chilean government from 1970-1973, confronted the question “what holds things together?” while imprisoned following the coup d'état there in 1973. Later, after his release and emigration to the United States, he completed a doctorate and further developed the application of **Speech Acts**. (“Speech Theory” was originally introduced in 1962 by linguist J.L. Austin, subsequently refined by Austin's student, John Searle, and later, by Jurgen Habermas and Flores, among others.) These were simple, everyday language acts that proved profoundly important for holding together social life. In the fidelity of the speech acts, he saw how the integrity of language and action were the nexus of a vital and safe social life. Life is safer and more

effective when we are clear and deliberate around the use of “assessments, assertions, requests, agreements, offers, and declarations.”

Language, Flores understood, gives voice to our physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual understanding of life. Those beliefs and behaviors support or challenge certain values, cultures, systems, and structures. They have the power to create and sustain as well as to violate and destroy.

We use language to declare our intentions, create affiliation, put “stakes in the ground” about particular beliefs, establish our social contract, ask for commitments and make offers that help mend and strengthen the ties that bind humans. These conversations allow people to speak and collectively know their emerging story, and to be able to step forward, confront and transform destructive beliefs and behaviors.

Humans want to contribute value, and find or create meaning by being a part of something bigger. So we make offers to others, to the world. When something is happening in our life that affects our health and well-being, we make inquiries. We declare what matters and why. Speech acts denote more than our integrity as individuals, they help construct our identity and the identity of a local community, of the global community. We are what we say *and* do.

The poet T.S. Eliot saw the dissolution of ties between things as the grand descent into chaos and evil. He wrote, “Hell is where there are no connections.” Ultimately, arbitrariness is untenable for humans. The anxiety it produces undermines stability and the social contract. When forced to endure it we

do, but at significant cost to health and social well-being. Much of what makes life safe and livable is that it is somewhat predictable. Therefore, we live easier and more constructively when people *say what they mean*, and *do what they say*—both at home and in the public commons. Private and public requests and agreements allow us to build what we commonly desire.

Big things are connected to small things. Large conflagrations are tied to small ones. The public and private are essentially of one fabric. The Speech Acts, and our actions, are the glue holding “the center” together. They are the basis for establishing and protecting dignity and justice in the human community. They are the ways we play out the archetypes that resonate across time, surfacing and re-surfacing generation after generation. Through the integrity of our speech and actions, we connect human to human. And we connect with the self. This is the stuff of the human journey.