

THE SEEDS OF KNOWLEDGE

By Verna Allee

The knowledge that guides us to healthy enterprise is not the knowledge of our minds, it is the knowledge of our hearts. Only in our hearts do we live the questions that matter. Only in our hearts do we dare to ask about not what we are doing, but why we are doing. Is our work alive with meaning and vision or are we scrambling after goals and short term objectives that we have no passion for? Whenever people tell me they are interested in knowledge I always ask why? If knowledge is the answer, what is the question? Where is it you hope that knowledge will take us? What is the real question that you are living in your company and is it a question you care about?

Questions open the world to us. Between not knowing and our urge to know is where we are most attentive and most alive. A vital question, a creative question, rivets our attention. All the creative power of our minds is focused on the question. Knowledge emerges in response to these compelling questions. They open us to new worlds and new knowledge, expanding together in a creative dance. Possibilities and questions expand together, becoming more creative, more diverse. The more we expand our questions, the healthier we become. The more we live into the questions that matter, the wiser we become.

Our questions have led us from the Industrial Age to the Knowledge Era, and they will take us beyond into worlds we can only imagine. The quality of those new worlds depends on the quality of our questions. We may not be the only species on the planet that is able to reflect on its own actions, but we are the most important species with that capability. For we alone have the power of life and death over all the other species and of the planet itself. How often do we include as company stakeholders those individuals, societies and species that are outside our social economic system? Yet, if we do not consider what is healthy and life sustaining for all of us, then how can we know what is healthy for ourselves or for the organizations we create? If we do not open our questions of knowledge to these considerations, then we have locked ourselves into a closed system that cannot survive.

Knowledge organizes around our sense of who we are. If we would expand our knowledge, then we must look at the self that creates it, both as an individual self, and as the collective self of our organization or enterprise. If we would master the Knowledge Era and move forward, then we must learn the art of asking self-reflective questions about our identity, our purpose and our values. As individuals, we do not leap to a completely new identity when our consciousness of self changes. We renew and recycle the components of our knowledge, awareness and understanding. As awareness about ourselves and who we are in the world changes, we materialize different responses, build new knowledge and develop new behaviors. We adapt, we evolve.

Questions of the heart and our deeply reflective self-questioning unlock the genetic code of our own wisdom and understanding. Such questions are the seeds of knowledge and the seeds of our evolution. Can we encourage this type of questioning in our organizations? Healthy systems are open systems, open to explore their self-identity, open to new information, open to different ways of thinking. Conscious self-questioning is the axis of growth. Can we encourage healthy inquiry and self-reflection? These are the real questions about how we manage our knowledge. Given our history they are also the toughest.

Can we learn to really trust ourselves and the creative power of the questions of our hearts? It seems to me that most of the messes we make are not because of what we know, but because of what we do not allow ourselves to know. It is our unasked questions that destroy us. We do not see that we already have the powerful questions and emergent knowledge that will guide us into the future. When we allow ourselves to experience the full power of the questions of our hearts perhaps we will move beyond the Knowledge Era to a world that is healthier and more diverse, more cooperative and, yes, a little wiser too.

Adapted from *The Knowledge Evolution: Expanding Organizational Intelligence*, by Verna Allee © Butterworth-Heinemann, 1997.