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Shades of Blue: Lenses and Perspectives on Organizational Dynamics

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Abstract

Some of the most influential people in my life had blue eyes: Carolina blue, iceberg blue, Scottish blue, and others. In seeking inspiration for my path of study toward the Master of Science degree in Organizational Dynamics, I have explored my own life and history as well as the history of our country to look through the lenses of the blue eyes of influential people. From their perspectives and my own, what would be the most important questions to ask and research during the next several years at Penn? As I am very early in my course of study, this paper will set forth some of those questions and will tell my story of inquiry and hope for enlightenment and knowledge.

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LENSES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

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Some of the most influential people in my life had blue eyes: Carolina blue, iceberg blue, Scottish blue, and others. In seeking inspiration for my path of study toward the Master of Science degree in Organizational Dynamics, I have explored my own life and history as well as the history of our country to look through the lenses of the blue eyes of influential people. From their perspectives and my own, what would be the most important questions to ask and research during the next several years at Penn? As I am very early in my course of study, this paper will set forth some of those questions and will tell my story of inquiry and hope for enlightenment and knowledge.

Shades of Blue

The Brilliant Blue Eyes of Youth – Innovation

My son Samuel has Carolina blue eyes. He is fifteen years old, brilliant, and gifted academically and athletically. His wisdom seems to grow daily, and his common sense approach to relationships is quite impressive. When I imagine myself looking through the lens of my fifteen-year-old son's eyes, I can't help being impressed by the size of the world he is entering as a young man. Even though, or perhaps because, technology has brought everyone closer in terms of communication channels (texting, tweeting, e-mail, on-demand video sharing), questions about the nature of global business, organizations, and specifically innovation in culture and business are interests my son inspires in me. How will innovation today and tomorrow be accomplished? How do we think in the US regarding innovation vs. how do other countries around the globe approach inventing new things? How will we empower the youth of today to think innovatively and how will they take new, potentially global ideas and collaborate across cultures, to improve the world? These questions I ask both from business and organizational perspectives as well as from sociological and sustainability perspectives. Innovation—how do we do it, improve it, and enable it to have an impact on our lives today and tomorrow? How do we make it easy for people to experiment with new ideas, giving them the necessary *thinking time* (Hamel, 2007, p. 55) to innovate? Writing a great story of and in our future will require innovation.

My son Samuel not only has Carolina blue eyes but also wants to wear the jersey of the Carolina Blue Tar Heels. Not a bad choice, although the Duke Blue Devils would be a good fit for him as would the blue (and red) of the University of

Pennsylvania. My hope is that both he, and I, will be innovative in creating our futures.

Iceberg Blue – Consulting

My wife, Debbie, has beautiful blue eyes that are the magnificent color of an Alaskan blue iceberg. Clear and focused, sparkling with life and interest. And intelligence. Debbie, years ago, started an IT consulting company, “Yarosh Consulting, Inc.” OK, maybe not the most creative of names, but, from a name-recognition perspective, it has paid off. She has come from nowhere, by herself, and has had terrific success over the years at completing numerous medium- and large-scale custom software development projects for many local clients. She is well known in the West Chester, Pennsylvania area for her dedication to getting the job done with high quality and personal care.

The question I ask myself when looking through her consulting lens is: how could I, too, wrap consulting and leadership skills around my own IT knowledge to potentially branch out to start my own IT consulting company one day? What would it take to break away from the big-organization world of which I am a part today? Can I not only learn the *know-how* to do this, but also combine it with a clear *know-why* (Kleiner, 2008) perspective as well? What consulting, coaching, and communication skills should I cultivate to broaden my current leadership skills? Could I do this? Would it work? How would I make it happen? Consulting and coaching in the world of IT: rich veins for exploration.

Even my younger son, Tim, is inspired by his mom's success. He's only twelve and is already talking about how he will take over her company some day. Maybe my education in this program can inspire him to do great things as well.

Azure – Altruism and Sustainability

Scottish born and Presbyterian, my grandfather, Henry Watson McHutchison, was a thirty-second degree Mason as well as a Shriner. He lived all over the world with his family, including my mom, and eventually returned to and lived in Philadelphia. I do not claim to be an expert (yet) on Freemasonry, but I do believe that to have had such high standing in that order, my grandfather must have contributed to society, organizations, and life in a very positive, moral way, as Masons would be expected to do. Expanding upon the theme of giving back, a Masonic theme, how can I improve my contributions to the organizations in which I work and participate? Perhaps “it takes a moral imperative” (Hamel, 2007, p. 63) to have a really successful organization. In what ways can I contribute to a moral imperative? What would that foster within an organization? What are some possibilities? Is joining a group such as the Masons an opportunity to give back effectively? Are there other organizations I could join that would be equally effective and fulfilling? In what ways can I find satisfaction in community service within my current organization? Mentoring perhaps? Does studying and contributing to sustainability within the DYNM program present opportunities not only for helping organizations become sustainable (and green), but also for improving the larger community in which I live?

The lens of my grandfather’s eyes, his blue, Scottish-flag-blue, eyes and the life he led provide the inspiration for the start of my own altruistic story.

Sky Blue – Leadership

Sky blue, the color of a mid-summer sky, was the color of my father’s eyes. His eyes reflected love, strength, courage, and intelligence. He was a prisoner of war in World War II, so they were also eyes that had seen and suffered through unspeakable

pain, pain that would become slightly less apparent over the years following the war, but pain that would never fully disappear or be forgotten. Educated after the war as a chemical engineer at Bucknell University, my dad, Frank Yarosh, enjoyed a long career in a Philadelphia-based utility company. Having managed an organization of more than six hundred and fifty people, my dad had experience in senior management as well as in mentoring young engineers just out of college. He was customer-focused; he had to be, as he ran a customer service department for the company. But he was even more employee-focused, so much so that he never even missed a funeral of an employee or a funeral of one of their significant family members. He cared. He was present. He was a leader.

His leadership skills originated, I believe, in his youth as he grew up in a coal mining town in up-state Pennsylvania. The son of a coal miner, he was tough. It was that toughness that helped him survive the significant ordeals of the German POW camp. As for me, he never told me what to do, including not answering my career questions. He would listen, but he would guide me to make my own decisions. And I did. I made some mistakes along the way, but I have learned from them. Memories of my dad inspire me to ask how can I build upon my strengths and find my potential (Morgan, 2006) to achieve excellence in leadership?

This program will afford me many opportunities to ask these types of questions. I only hope I turn out to be half the leader my dad was while he was with us.

Ben’s Blue Eyes – Happiness

The Penn campus was not too busy -- the school was on winter break -- and as we drove through the city I stopped to give my wife, sons, and mom a quick tour. As I stood with my family next to the statue, I

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looked over my shoulder and up at the large figure of Ben. Click. The picture was snapped. We thanked the passerby for taking a second or two to hold our camera and capture this quick walk-about moment for us. As we turned the corner, I read some of the quotations inscribed in the granite stones on Benjamin Franklin Walkway. I realized that Benjamin Franklin, the founder of Penn, would be a perfect person to look to for great questions to ask throughout my studies. He wore so many different lenses (including those of the bifocals he invented!) in his life -- those of an inventor, politician, diplomat, author, physicist, printer, and more -- that I asked myself, What would one of the best minds in US history want to know today if he were sitting next to me in class?

Upon researching Franklin, I came across many of his sayings that can provide enhancement to learning. One such is "Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment" (Brainy Quotes, 2010). This quotation gets to the essence of "suppression," a concept from George Valiant's study quoted within the article "What Makes Us Happy?" (Shenk, 2009). Valliant describes his long-term study of a group of men from Harvard and proposes key concepts about happiness. One of those concepts is suppression, an idea further explained in the DYNM 501 class by John Eldred as "waiting until you have an appropriate time to (try to) deal with a difficult situation" (Eldred, personal communication). Learning how to improve my abilities to use suppression better seems a valuable track of study to pursue.

What are strategies and techniques to manage organizational conflict? How can I better anticipate and mentally rehearse upcoming organizational events in order to reach more desired outcomes? How can understanding the politics of organizations help me be more successful in my future career, whatever I may become thanks to my growth and development through participation in the Organizational Dynamics program? So Ben Franklin's perspectives, how he looked at life, happiness, and how to live well (Franklin, 1914), set the stage for core questions for me to examine during my studies. Even on a quiet campus, the quick tour had been inspiring.

And yes, Benjamin Franklin's eyes were blue (Answers.com, 2010). They must have been electric blue.

Shades of blue have provided me with inspiration for designing my course of study by asking significant questions throughout the Organizational Dynamics program. How can I be innovative in my thinking, coach people, perhaps as a consultant, be happy and live well, give back to organizations, and teach and lead while doing so? How can I continue to learn as an adult, expanding my leadership capabilities? Whether I look at my sons or my wife; think of my grandfather's life, along with my mom's life that has mirrored his generosity in countless ways; think of Ben Franklin as I walk around campus; or look up into the sky on any given day and think of my dad, I am rich in resources and blue lenses of inspiration to keep me motivated and moving on my way.

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