

INTEGRAL LEADERSHIP COLLABORATIVE

Interview Notes:

Feminine Leadership Discussion



The Gifts and Challenges of the Feminine Interview Notes

Allison Conte is coach, change agent, community builder and facilitator and is currently involved with The Authentic World Organization.

Willow Dea is the Editor of the book, Igniting Brilliance: Integral Education for the 21st Century and is supporting the upcoming conference for Leadership and Sustainability in the Netherlands.

Sandra Hill functions as Leadership Development and Organizational Effectiveness Consultant and is currently involved in designing leadership development programs focusing on expanding world views, thinking and reality.

What is it that excites you about this topic - The Gifts and Challenges of the Feminine?

- Excited about this dialogue. It's important that we open this topic up for conversation and support.*
- The most exciting thing for me is that I now, don't feel alone in this conversation. In the past, I've questioned if I am the only one who has had these experiences of*

bumping up against these challenges. I'm excited to have this conversation with other women.

- I'm excited about the pleasure and power of being in the feminine, in the work place and anywhere in the world. I'm interested in ways to bring forth the feminine and am ready to go there and explore with the integral community.*

Your topic is really inviting, how do you frame this for yourselves?

- Gifts of the feminine are so evident to see, they are radiance, light and beauty. The qualities so needed in leadership today, are associated with feminine ways of being, including: creativity, intuition, the ability to reflect deeply and be in relationship. These are gifts of the feminine.*
- One of the best gifts of the feminine is a highly tuned bullshit meter! We are calibrated to discern what's true and what's not. Generally, we carry a wider sphere of caring and awareness for others and have a greater ability to hold the whole.*

- *The feminine way of discerning the truth is different than the masculine way. The feminine way comes from an embodied wisdom; the truth shows up in the body as an intuitive sense - a subtle energy of sorts to understand the truth.*
- *Connection is a natural feminine trait. When the feminine is embodied, the quality of connection is amazing and flowers what is taking place.*

When we look at what's happening right now in U.S. politics, it's interesting to consider the important missing pieces that the feminine could provide. Just thinking about the value of the bullshit meter, not in the typical shout you down manner, but with a degree of compassion to say "stop". What a gift it would be for the world and even for the women in congress to feel as if they have the freedom and capacity to bring the feminine to this discourse and say "bullshit". Our country needs this so much, what a gift this would be.

- *The tragedy, however, is that this gift is often shut down by the systems that we are all part of. There is*

a repression of that gift and is at times, seen as inappropriate.

- It takes high degree of emotional intelligence and personal development to deliver messages that they are effective, meaningful and useful. The dark side of the feminine can bring about a bitchy quality and is important to watch for that. In a well developed, feminine, integrated and mature woman there is a notability, clarity and neutrality of communication available. While this is rare, it is important to aspire to and practice this type of communication.*
- I see that more naturally happening when there is support for that. It is the isolation and repression that brings out those negative qualities.*

Given that there are fewer women in the halls of power, this isolation is a real factor to consider and may lead to hesitation by some women.

- This isolation can play out in men who express the feminine. They too, are often ignored and rejected.*
- I've had many experiences in the work place, where my feminine ways of being are unwanted or have made people*

feel uncomfortable. I'm so glad to open up this conversation with people within the integral community to assist in reducing the isolation.

Thinking about some of the experiences we have had Allison, I've been compelled to stop and ask those people who have expressed negativity toward you, to ask them whether or not the reaction was about you or them. Those really thoughtful individuals immediately agree that there may be something about themselves that sparked their negative response.

- There's vulnerability in saying "I'm uncomfortable here" instead of making someone wrong. Internally, it's difficult to separate what's being expressed, from the uncomfortable personal experience of the expression.*
- A colleague and I were working in an organization and received feedback from the client who reported feeling uncomfortable about my feminine energy. My colleague thought it was about my clothing and so I went about trying on new outfits. I felt miserable; a sense of having to make myself smaller or in putting myself into a box to fit. I wanted to do my part to focus on the work and not be a distraction. It was painful. My colleague finally conceded that it wasn't about the*

clothing. There's something about feminine radiance and feminine energy especially if there's sexual power present that feels really good to bring, as a feminine being, and feels painful to rein that in. In the workplace this can be edgy stuff.

- *It's important to clarify, that in bringing your full sexual power and radiance, isn't about being specifically sexual in your behavior. There is a difference. There is power in being an embodied beautiful woman. Many of us have experienced being criticized for showing up fully. I want to invite us to explore a lived inquiry about what happens when we bring our full feminine radiance to work and heal the men with our beauty. Why can't this work?*
- *The healing can be more expansive with beauty, radiance and heart. There's a lot of healing that the feminine can bring to the world of leaders and the workplace that has been historically overly masculine.*
- *How can we invite our sisters to overcome the awkwardness, discomfort, fear and shame of their sensuality?*

- *As we began this conversation about the gifts and challenges of being a woman in the workplace, the fulcrum point lies in our sexuality.*

Help me understand how the perspective of Integral Leadership informs your understanding of the gifts and challenges of the feminine.

- *We need to make sure we are asking the missing questions stemming from the four quadrants including: the subjective experiences - the meaning making; the stories - the value sharing; the systems and the behavioral practices.*

A lot of people would put the emphasis on the individual, but I hear you saying that we need to move toward including the collective dimensions. It's important for the individual and collective to stand up together.

- *The collective is driving the behaviors and yet we point to the individual. In a recent experience in building a Leadership Development Program, I hired a number of women to work on the project. We made a decision to support each other and not suppress any parts of ourselves. We influenced the system, which was just as fearful as any other system that encounters difference, by supporting each other. We experienced*

tensions in the male dominated group, and our ability to support one another and dialogue about our experiences was important to the whole group. It's such a mistake to look at an individual person and judge that they aren't enlightened or they haven't been able to step into the wholeness of themselves, when systems drive most of what takes place. We have to own that and engage in open dialogue to keep the systems open for change.

This conversation is amazing. I think we are just scratching the surface.

- *One of the things that struck me is how important it is to take to on the topic of sexuality and normalize that as part of our wholeness. Within our culture, talking about our sexuality is not comfortable, especially when compared to Europeans.*

Looking forward to the on-line collaborative, what hopes do you have for attendees?

- *I am hoping - that people will show up and experience her, the feminine, as mystery, as vitality, feeling the current of life force running through the sessions. I hope that people will have a full body experience, not just heady cognitive experience.*

- *I would love to hear how women feel about being sexually embodied in the workplace and in their lives and how that has played out for them. I'd love to open up a larger conversation and blog about that.*
- *I am hoping that our dialogue is a real invitation for others to join us.*

Allison Conte

As a leadership advisor and organization development consultant, Allison specializes in generating transformative, sustainable change in complex systems. Her whole-systems approach integrates strategy, leadership, execution and culture from an integral perspective.

Allison has worked for 20 years with organizations of all sizes across a variety of industries. Her expertise includes applications of Integral Theory, Gestalt Theory, Appreciative Inquiry, systems thinking, complexity science, emotional intelligence, developmental psychology, adult learning and Holacracy.

For several years, Allison served as a team member of the Integral Institute's Business and Leadership Center. She has taught at various Integral conferences and at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland. She is currently developing two new bodies of work: a year-long development program for integral consultants, and a program for senior organizational leaders called Engaging the Future. She also facilitates the Red Pill Weekend, an integral relationship workshop for men.

Her professional training includes a Masters in Positive Organization Development from Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management; advanced studies at Integral Institute and NTL Institute; and post-graduate work at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland.



Willow Dea

Willow Dea, M.S. OTR, is deeply inspired by the impact of transformational practices in emerging educational systems. Her thirst for working with systems began with the human body. She holds a bachelor's and master's degree in occupational therapy, the science of human performance. As a relentlessly curious learner, she was certified in five additional modalities of human integration which facilitate sustained peak performance and conscious embodiment.



Willow has used an integral approach with her clients in private practice and in educational settings for 15 years, providing leading edge services for people of all ages. She is currently the Technical & Systems Director for an integrally informed school in downtown Austin, called the Khabele School. Willow is the Editor of *Igniting Brilliance: Integral Education in the 21st Century*.

Sandra Hill

As an organizational consultant and executive coach, Dr. Sandra Hill has spent more than 25 years assisting thousands of leaders and their direct reports in enhancing organizational capabilities. For 11 years, as senior lead organizational consultant in a Fortune 50 telecommunications company with over sixty consultants and trainers reporting to her, she was responsible for developing and then providing a full range of organizational development consulting services including strategic planning, leadership development, executive coaching, team building, performance management, communication systems, and merging of organizational cultures.



Michael McElhenie

Michael McElhenie, Ph.D., has led major humanitarian projects, many for the United Nations, in regions around the globe: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the Caribbean. Michael's key area of expertise is helping executives assess the organization's culture, discover optimal mission-alignment and bridge the gap through intentional, integral leadership. He has designed and implemented major leadership, executive coaching, change and learning projects for global and national clients, including American Airlines, Anadarko Petroleum, Berlex Pharmaceuticals, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Exelon Energy, H&R Block, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Motorola, Nortel Networks, Progressive Insurance, Sabre, Texas Children's Hospital, Texas Instruments, Unicredito Banca, Unilever, United Nations, Victoria Order of Nurses (Canada), Wal-Mart, World Bank and YMCA. Michael has over twenty years of leadership and consulting experience, and he currently runs Metatropia Institute, a leader development and change management firm out of Dallas, Texas. He is a faculty member for Duke Corporate Education's Global Learning Resource Network, a faculty-coach for Southern Methodist University's Advanced Leadership Program and a member of the Business & Leadership Center for Integral Institute. He is also a Senior Associate for Teleos Leadership Institute and has worked with Teleos since its founding in 2002.

