

The Wisdom of Margaret Wheatley

A Biographical Sketch

Margaret Wheatley is a noted author, educator and consultant. Her doctoral work at Harvard focused on organizational behavior and change. She continued this interest in the writing of *Leadership and the New Science (Learning about Organizations for an Orderly Universe)*, an award winning book. She helped to found the Berkana Institute, a charitable scientific, educational, and research foundation founded in 1991 and currently serves as its President. Berkana experiments with many forms of inquiry into the new ideas and structures that represent the future of organizing.

To give you a sense of Margaret's broad perspective, I offer the following personal quote from her website, "I have always found my attention drawn in many different directions, from science, to history, to English literature, to systems thinking, to organizational behavior, to social policy. I value what I've learned from each of these different fields, because no one discipline, institution, or specialization can answer the questions that now confront us. We all must draw from many different perspectives to reweave the world."

Now, let us hear from Dr. Wheatley as she teaches us in *Leadership and the New Science*.

To Embrace Wonder

"This is a world of wonder and not knowing, where scientists are as awestruck by what they see as were the early explorers who marveled at new continents. In this realm, there is a new kind of freedom, where it is more rewarding to explore than to reach conclusions, more satisfying to wonder than to know, and more exciting to search than to stay put."

"In many systems, scientists now understand that order and conformity and shape are created not by complex controls, but by the presence of a few guiding formulae or principles. The survival and growth of systems that range in size from large ecosystems down to tiny leaves are made possible by the combination of key patterns or principles that express the system's overall identity and great levels of autonomy for individual system members."

Control

"All this time we have created trouble for ourselves in organizations by confusing control with order. This is no surprise, given that for most of its written history, management has been defined in terms of its control functions...If organizations are machines, control makes sense. If organizations are process structures, then seeking to impose control through permanent structure is suicide."

In Pursuit of Relationships

"To live in a quantum world, to weave here and there with ease and grace, we will need to change what we do. We will need to stop describing tasks and instead facilitate process. We will need to become savvy about how to build relationships, how to nurture growing, evolving things."

"Love (emphasis mine) in organizations, then, is the most potent source of power we have available. And all because we inhabit a quantum universe that knows nothing of itself, independent of its relationships."

An Act of Faith

"I, too, can feel the ground shaking. I hear its deep rumblings. Any moment now, the earth will crack open and I will stare into its dark center. Into that smoking caldera, I will throw most of what I have treasured; most of the techniques and tools that have made me feel competent. I cannot do that yet. I cannot just heave everything I know into the abyss. But I know its coming. And when it comes, when I have made my sacrificial offerings to the gods of understanding, then the ruptures will cease. Healing waters will cover the land, giving birth to new life, burying forever the ancient, rusting machines of our past understandings. And on these waters I will set sail to places I only now imagine. There I will be blessed with new visions and new magic. I will feel once again like a creative contributor to this mysterious world. But for now, I wait. An act of faith. Land ho."