

Tami Simon, CEO of Sounds True, 2003 Willis Harman Spirit at Work Honoree

Interview Summary (April 27, 2011)

Host: Tom Anderson

Sponsor: Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace

We started the call with this poem from David Whyte:

*Start close in,  
don't take the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
thing  
close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.*

Start with  
the ground  
you know,  
the pale ground  
beneath your feet,  
your own  
way of starting  
the conversation.

Start with your own  
question,  
give up on other  
people's questions,  
don't let them  
smother something  
simple.

To find  
another's voice,  
follow  
your own voice,  
wait until  
that voice  
becomes a  
private ear  
listening  
to another.

Start right now  
take a small step  
you can call your own  
don't follow  
someone else's  
heroics, be humble  
and focused,  
start close in,  
don't mistake  
that other  
for your own.

*Start close in,  
don't take  
the second step  
or the third,  
start with the first  
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close in,  
the step  
you don't want to take.*

*Start Close In* by David Whyte from the book,  
*River Flow: New & Selected Poems* (Langley,  
Washington: Many Rivers Press. 2007)

The interview began with Tami sharing her story about how Sounds True began. One of the more striking pieces of the story is how the seed of the company was planted; or better said, discovered; from a place and time in her life that felt very much like a failure to her. Sounds True was born from an original idea that is still the purpose of the company today: to disseminate spiritual wisdom.

We moved from talking about the company's history to some ideas about what leadership looks like to her. Specifically, I asked Tami to talk about this posting from her blog that referred to David Whyte's idea about the "conversational nature of reality:" On her blog, Tami wrote:

"What if we lived our lives as if we were deeply engaged in an open-ended conversation? What if we asked our heart's most central questions and then followed the thread of responses delivered by the world, even if it leads us into unknown places?"

Tami expanded on this idea by saying that there are many kinds of conversations going on all the time in her business life. For example, there are ongoing conversations with customers who let her know what they want and don't want through their purchases, conversations with employees on all sorts of levels, and conversations with suppliers and vendors. The key, she says, is to stay open and curious rather than locked down and willful.

We also talked about the Sounds True triple bottom line of people, purpose, and profit; and in particular, the importance of staying true to the original purpose. The profit bottom line, she said, is negotiable—the bottom lines about people and purpose are not.

One of the more interesting things Tami shared about Sounds True was that, although they are in the business of disseminating spiritual wisdom, the people who work there don't really describe the company as being spiritual. What they say is that Sounds True is a place where they feel very comfortable bringing their whole selves to work every day.

We concluded the call with these three lessons Tami has said sum up what she has learned over 25 years at Sounds True:

1. Nobody really knows what's going on. And whatever IS going on is changing all the time.
2. Even though nobody knows what's going on, everybody has an inner guide, an inner authority. We should have confidence in our own connection to truth, not as separateness, but individuality.
3. There's no end to growing, to discovering new things, to improving our relationships with others, and to deepening our experience of Source as Source.

And this reminder from the poetry of David Whyte:

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