

HOW TO CULTIVATE WISDOM AT WORK

Why the Boardroom needs wisdom now more than ever





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Wisdom is a difficult word to define, and an even harder thing to cultivate. The rewards for doing so, however, are immeasurable.

With all of the challenges inherent to board work, we need wisdom now more than ever.

Indeed, ***wisdom is essential in the boardroom.***

It brings out the best in us and those around us, helps us discern right action and right timing, and helps us transform challenges into learnings and conflicts into collaborations.

Wisdom is a way of being.

But where does it come from and how do we get more of it?

In this guide we take a deep dive into wisdom, both what it is and how to cultivate it in your life and board work.

Enjoy!

- *The Concinnity Company Team*

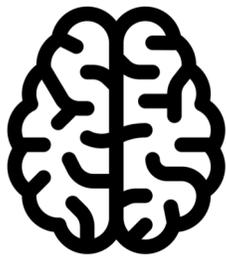
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What is *Wisdom*?

Neuropsychologist Vivian Clayton spent her lifetime exploring and documenting wisdom. She identifies its essential elements to be:

COGNITION • REFLECTION • COMPASSION



Cognition is how we process information. Faster is better, right? Wrong. Studies show that wisdom is more about *how* than *how fast*. It's about being able to connect dots. The ability to take data or raw, disparate information and convert it to decision-support information. For board directors, this means that the willingness to gather information rather than making snap judgements is essential.



Reflection demands deliberate action. We must step outside ourselves to review a situation from multiple perspectives, not just our own. We must practice understanding ourselves outside of our emotional reactions, with calm instead of hypersensitivity. Then, situations become puzzles to solve rather than reasons to panic. Board members must have the steady hand to navigate challenge.



We choose to be compassionate; it doesn't just happen. Choosing compassion lets us see the humanity in another person rather than making them simply "the enemy." It allows us to use time, understanding, and conversation, to find a solution where everyone benefits. Situations shift from battlegrounds to opportunities to work together.

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Listen Well: By listening, the process of defining problems becomes a joint exercise, a team effort, rather than being handed down from on high or outside. When this happens, truth is discovered together. There is less resistance to acknowledging problems and solutions become shared creations. Voices avoid the shrill expression of judgment because they naturally modulate down when all are working toward discovery. And in the process—the process of listening and discovering together, of inviting participation—people get buy-in.



Do the Work of the Whole: In cutthroat boardroom and business environments, “looking out for number one” can too often seem diametrically opposed to looking out for the benefit of everyone involved – indeed, competition can (when taken to an extreme) crowd out a shared accountability for the work of the whole. Wisdom reminds us that the winner does not always take all, especially when there are many integrated stakeholders involved and the best solution requires more than one person taking interwoven action.



Respect Imperfection: Wise people are not perfect people. They learn from their mistakes and have lived enough life to make a lot of mistakes. They can empathize, and certainly sympathize, with a wide range of problems, and they know that perfection is not required, and often not even preferable. They respond to an individual and a situation rather than falling back on platitudes. Often, they are not people in the same exact industry as us, but someone who is thoughtful about their work and the lessons they have learned.



Consider Your Decisions: A big part of wisdom is the process by which we arrive at our decisions. Consider your own decision making— actions, emotions, relationships—and their consequences. Take the time to gather all the facts you need before deciding, and be willing to take the time you need to feel strong about your decision. Wisdom considers rather than reacts.

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Manage Yourself: A big part of wisdom is knowing how to manage yourself. Self-management includes the decision-making process, but it goes beyond that. It includes managing your own feelings, emotions, and confidence as you go about making inquiries, devising solutions, arriving at decisions, and leading. It also involves managing yourself, including your emotions, once the decision is made.



Navigate Consequences: Wise people have a totally different relationship with consequences, both of their behaviors and of things outside their control. They understand that their work is done within a community. That their views are just one component of the picture. They see that they only control a fraction of the consequences. Accepting this, it is easier to accept consequences whatever they may be. Wise leaders accept their successes and their failures.



Be Around Wise People: Spending time with wise people is a way to cultivate wisdom. This doesn't have to be a professional "mentoring" relationship with a week-by-week schedule -- it can be a great conversation with someone you know and respect, even if they are not in the same industry. Wisdom shifts to suit the time, place, and people -- intentionally spending more time around wise people helps understand the different ways that wisdom shows up in the world.



Never Stop Learning: Mature leaders understand that cultivating wisdom is an ongoing practice. They understand the necessity of learning as a lifelong activity. It's not that they know something others don't -- it's that they know that they don't know many things. They are ever eager to close the gaps in their learning. They don't fear asking questions. They seek out wise people to help them find the answers.