

If you only have a minute: Rooted and unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. As leaders, we can unleash collective genius when we create a safe space for people to be authentic.

Creating the Safest Table in the Room

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

“It is impossible to be authentic and to do what other people approve of at the same time.” – Teal Scott

As a child growing up in the deep South, Pamela Mattsson learned to dance. That is, she learned to dance with authority, to someone else’s music - overachieving, worried about what other people thought, and trying to “get it right.” She was precocious and curious, pushing boundaries and then pushing them more.

The problem, she eventually realized, was that she forgot her true self in the process. “I know I leave myself when I’m worried about what other people think,” she says. Inspired by her insight, she started to listen more deeply to her inner self and live and lead from that more grounded place.

Today, Pamela is SVP of People and Organizational Development at Outreach. When interpersonal dynamics bring dissonance to the table, Pamela knows she must first find her music – her inner resonance - connect with her truth, and invite others to do the same. She reminds us that our job as leaders is to unleash this collective genius – to create the conditions for people, including ourselves, to do our best work. Part of unleashing genius is to invite people’s authentic truths, however challenging.

No one says this is easy. We tend to have well-practiced, adaptive strategies to stay in relationship, whatever the cost, including hiding from truth. “But,” Pamela points out, “to honor the dissonance within myself, I need to tell others where I stand even if they don’t like it. And that’s not a disconnect – that is how we remain transparent and connect deeply with others.”

To help others express their inner dissonance, she points out, the team table has to be the safest one in the room - a place to connect, to say, “I don’t know,” to make a mistake, to be vulnerable and to experiment. It means that all ideas as well as disagreements, challenges and debates must be welcome. “Safety at the table,” she says, “allows for messy realness on the road to the truth.”

“We are connected. It’s a choice to pay attention to and feed that connectedness.” - Pamela Mattsson