"I want to catch what people are offering, catch everything as help; like Aikido. Aikido is a martial art where it doesn’t matter what intention somebody is moving towards you with. I can always catch it as helpful energy -- I get to develop this redirecting skill."

Jeannie Kahwajy is an executive coach and the founder of Effective Interactions. She believes an attitude of love is the most effective way to show up for all our interactions. It’s a theory she’s put to the test (often with jaw-dropping results) in challenging encounters with diverse personalities, including a purse-thief on board a moving train, a seemingly biased employer, a cocky student, and a rude colleague. In this in-depth interview she shares fascinating stories of her approach, and helpful guidelines for putting it into practice. What follows is an edited version of her Awakin Call interview, moderated by Preeta Bansal and hosted by Aryae Coopersmith. You can access the recording of the call and the full-length transcript here.

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Preeta: Jeannie Kahwajy believes it is possible for a single participant in an interaction to adapt his or her behavior and alter the communication dynamic, even when interacting with someone stuck in another mode. She has been inspired to challenge the traditional paradigm of interactions, including the acclaimed ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ theory. This theory states that what a teacher or another higher-standing individual expects of me, will often define how I perform or behave in that interaction. In popular parlance, it’s often known as the ‘Pygmalion effect’ named for George Bernard Shaw’s play Pygmalion, adapted for the stage and the movies as ‘My Fair Lady’. In ‘Pygmalion’, Eliza Doolittle explains to Mrs. Higgins that the difference between a lady and a flower girl lies not in how she behaves, but in how she is treated.

This theory, designed to explain the performance consequences of low expectations, views the low-target person as someone who is powerless to affect the power dynamic within the relationship. This together with confirmation bias -- the concept that those in authority tend to hear people and ideas that confirms what they already agree with, can often lead to organizational stagnation and creativity loss.

Jeannie kind of uproots all these ideas. She was motivated to understand how a single person, especially a person lower in the hierarchy, can interrupt this negative cycle and stop being a passive recipient. And what she found in her research is that the low-status person can actually love the higher-status person into finding their way out of the belief-consistency-trap. She calls this ‘the receiving mode’. This is the mode in which a person views and treats every relationship before them as an opportunity to learn and love, rather than to perform, do, and display.
Jeannie’s approach is scientific, innovative, and fairly counterintuitive. And it has achieved breakthrough results with senior executives in major corporations on six continents. Dr. Kahwajy holds multiple degrees from Stanford University, a Ph.D. in organizational behavior and a Ph.D. minor in social psychology, an MBA, and an MS in engineering economic systems, with a concentration in decision science. She also has a bachelor’s in systems engineering from the University of Virginia. I’m very excited to have this conversation with her. So welcome, Jeannie!

Jeannie: Thank you, Preeta. Wow! What an introduction. I think you are embodying the entire message both in content, and how you are being when you’re talking about the content.

Preeta: I would love to start with your foundational story. How did you get interested in exploring interpersonal interactions?

Jeannie: I grew up in a wonderful family with Lebanese origins. Both of my grandparents came from a European or Middle Eastern country -- my mother’s side from Romania, my father’s from Lebanon. I have siblings that are very close in age to me and I was the youngest of three. I grew up in a family that democratized opportunity; for example, my mother used to stagger our naps, so we each could get all the attention we needed! Growing up, I never thought that I couldn’t have my own opinions. Even my grandfather -- I noticed how whenever he walked into a room, everything seemed more important. And he wasn’t doing all the things that we are typically taught are useful, to gain a person’s goodwill. He would tell you exactly what he thought and he wouldn’t waste your time. And we would like him more! Somehow, I was faced in my family and upbringing with behaviors that seemed extremely effective but they didn’t have any of the trappings of what the world would consider ‘political correctness’.

So something as simple as – “I would like this; would you give it to me?” is far superior than “Let me give you all the reasons, why you should want to give this to me.” And so I guess, I grew up with a dichotomy, that developed in me a real curiosity about what’s going on in the world and what is truly effective behavior. And I started taking notes, observing other people and myself; observing which behaviors felt good and which didn’t.

I grew up in Maryland and spent all my growing years there, near Washington DC. I went to University of Virginia and studied systems engineering. And I got very interested in, what I accidentally found, was called decision science. And that led me to Stanford. I applied to one graduate program and a faculty member I wanted to work with was Ron Howard. He wasn’t even taking Master students as advisees. But I wrote in my essay that I wished to work with him and ended up as his advisee. That biblical statement, “Ask and you shall receive” is quite powerful! You better be careful what you ask for, with your heart. I think the universe will give it to you, and give you more than you actually expected.

Preeta: You said you monitored which behaviors made you feel good and which ones worked. What did you find out, as a lay observer, before you began to research it academically?

Jeannie: That is a very good question. I think sometimes you learn this particular way of being, not cognitively, but just by experience. I remember, when I was 17, I worked at this family theme park called Wild World. And one of my colleagues there was Steve, a friend of my brother’s, who I had known for about 10 years. And he came up to me, one
day, and said “I’ve been observing you for 10 years.” And I said “Oh, really.” And he said, “Whenever we are in a situation, you seem to get things that aren’t even on the menu. And people seem happier to give it to you than even you are receiving it. I’ve seen you do this routinely.”

When we were talking, I had been eating French fries and I’d wanted ketchup. I was tired and it was so far away at this big cafeteria. And he said, “Wait a minute, let me get you ketchup.” And he ran across this big cafeteria and got me the ketchup. And then he realized, “You did it to me! You did it to me.” So, Steve looked at me very sternly and said, “You need to figure out what you’re doing and articulate it to the world, because I want to know what you’re doing!” That is when I really started taking notes, because Steve wanted it. Even the birth of the ‘receiving mode’ theory was invited by a receptive interaction!

Preeta: So, in that ketchup story when Steve went across the cafeteria and got it for you, do you have any sense of what you were doing that led him to do that?

Jeannie: Well, a couple of things, that I think I was doing. I was being clear with what I wanted. I must have told him that I would enjoy these French fries so much more if I had ketchup. But I didn’t share with him with any kind of expectation/force/agenda for him to go get it. I was almost offering it as: “Oh, here is what I’ve been enlightened, regarding my desires. Let me share it with you. Maybe you can help me gain enough energy to go over and get the ketchup.” So I didn’t have a rigid prediction on who was supposed to do what. And that has parlayed into the definition of receiving theory: Share with people what you truly want, but not in a forcing way.

I see the subtleties now. I could say something like, “Do you have any questions?” and really communicate “you better not have any questions for me.” There is this space underneath our actions that I call the intentional space and it is like wind or gravity. And I’m in control, over whether I’m inviting you. I’m having the wind come from you to me, in terms of an invitation. Or I’m trying to push you away, with a gust of wind. When I’m saying, “You don’t have any questions, do you?”, if people have questions they won’t ask them, because I’m not ready to receive them!

And I was always observing that there are two states of being – one was effective; the other was ineffective. And I realized that we didn’t know that we had complete control over this. When I was being most effective, I noticed that the other person was delighted and so was I. But when I was being ineffective, I was really frustrated and so was the other person. So I developed and have gotten to test notions that if you win, I win and if you lose, I lose.

Preeta: Let’s look at your work around low-status individuals within any exchange. Let’s say I’m working for an auto dealership. I have the idea that we should be expanding to a new market. My boss doesn’t think much of my contributions on the creative side. He just wants me to do what he tells me to do. So I’m having an interaction with him and it is kind of based on past interactions, but I really want to try and shift that dynamic. How would that work?

Jeannie: You have a focus. If I’m an employee going to my boss, I typically have this focus, which is that my boss has to change. And I’m judging him. And I can’t be judging and receiving at the same time. So when I approach my boss, instead of throwing my suggestion at him, I’m going to offer it as a gift. When you offer a gift, you are curious to know what the recipient thinks of it, and that shifts everything.
I have another story here -- I was working in an investment bank in London and I approached this guy who’d failed to comply with what I’d told him to do. He wasn’t my direct subordinate, but he ran the computer systems and in order for my program to be implemented, his team had to perform. I started telling him what he didn’t do and why he should do it. Those were days when smoking was allowed. He started slowly blowing smoke in my face, till I was literally suffocating. I had just finished business school, and was employing all these traditional negotiation tactics, but they weren’t working.

So all of a sudden, as I was choking, I got to the end of my unraveled rope. And in a very non-sequitur way, I said, “Am I really yelling at you?” And he said, “Why yes, you are.” And I said, “Well that really surprises me. Does that surprise you?” And he said, “No.” “How come? I want to know,” I asked. He said, “Well, you’ve been hanging out with all those traders over there.”

The traders I was working with were lovely people, and very different people outside the trading desk, but I was actually becoming like them. However, once I’d shifted my mode, things changed. He gave me a VIP tour of the bank and delivered all of the computer systems before he went home that evening!

Preeta: So, I just want to get that story right. You shifted into receiving mode with someone who was physically assaulting you with smoke?

Jeannie: Well, you enter into what I call crisis mode. And when you are in crisis mode, you are just like “help me, help me.” Often when you are in crisis mode, the person that can help you the most, is the one offending you the most.

I think I actually learned this from an experience with feedback forms. I was teaching a course with my colleague, Leo, in New Orleans to some senior oil executives. I taught a 3-day class and was going to teach a 2-day class later that week with the same group of people. We typically have evaluations at the end of each course.

When I got my evaluation, it was all 5s except for one 1 on an evaluation. And this guy who gave me the 1, was going to be in my next class. So, I was devastated. I was jogging through the streets of New Orleans and Leo who was there, knew I’d done a good job but was still disappointed. And he looked at me and said, “Jeannie, I have a problem with how you are still perturbed by this. You have this information. You’re going to see him tomorrow. Go up to him directly and ask him about it.”

This is what receiving really is, if we give people correct feedback that really fuels them. Well it turns out this guy didn’t really understand something. In trying to rationalize why he didn’t understand it, he blamed it all on me. To segue, this is how I found out that in the world, when we look around for someone to blame, we usually look for a very smart woman! Anyway, I was able to get around what he was judging and to convert that judgment into what he truly wanted. I explained it to him again, personally. And then he changed my grade to a 6! So the people that are criticizing us, they are our teachers.

Preeta: What do you do in a situation where there is actually insidious bias involved? Say, I’m African American and I have a boss who thinks that whatever I put forward is not worthy of serious attention. How do I shift that?

Jeannie: Here’s the thing: however my brain thinks is a way to be heard, do the
opposite of that. I remember I was overlooked for a consulting position on a project and I was available, and interested in it. The head partner decided to take a guy off a case that he was in the middle of, and put him on his thing, overlooking me.

So, I went to the head in an inquiring mode because I wanted to shift. I really wanted to be prepared to be a viable candidate in a similar situation in the future. So I went and asked him from my heart, “Can you help me understand why you picked him over me?” I said, “Because I am available and he is not. Was it because he speaks Spanish?” (Actually he didn’t and I did). Then I said to him, “I bet it was because you’d worked with him before.” (He hadn’t worked with either of us). And then I said, “I know he’s probably done a lot of these portfolio projects before”. It was a particular kind of analysis project and it turns out that I’d done them and he hadn’t.

So here I am offering him information that he was unaware of, and probably if he had been told in a different way, he would have just rationalized it away. That afternoon, I was put on the project. And I’m very grateful to him. I wasn’t angry with him for being biased against me. I went to him because I wanted to learn from his bias. So I had to love him and his bias and the injustice or else I was going to leave value on the table unrealized.

Preeta: I was really struck when you said, “I needed to learn from his bias and the injustice.”

Jeannie: Yeah, and I really consider that to be a large gift. One of my clients in Geneva, Switzerland said, “You are retraining people’s eyes.” I want to catch what people are offering, catch everything as help; like Aikido. Aikido is a martial art where it doesn’t matter what intention somebody is moving towards you with. I can always catch it as helpful energy -- I get to develop this redirecting skill. You know, this reminds me of another pivotal event that happened in my early childhood. And it might have been what triggered a lot of this shift. When I was in junior high school, a person I knew ended up getting pregnant. And it was shocking, and so sad. She had the baby and I believe, had great difficulty with her family. And I remember my neighbor saying, “You know, this girl needs our support, our encouragement and our help; she does not need our judgment.” So even that insight came from an external source. I really pondered that for a very, very long time.

Preeta: Your theory, your practice -- all of this sounds brilliant and exactly right. At the start of the call, you said you grew up in a family where your opinion mattered. When someone grows up in a different environment where they don’t have that sense of being, how do you teach them this?

Jeannie: I’ve had this question asked often. I think, initially, I have to demonstrate to people that I am interested in helping them, and not in judging. That then enables them to share with me their real struggles. So, there’s authenticity. And I often think of it as having to be receptive, and that is what allows them to be unafraid.

And I think once you begin to practice these methods and then keep doing it, it becomes almost like an addiction. After you learn good grammar, you can’t use bad grammar in an interaction anymore. When you know internally what it feels like to be in an effective interaction, then it just doesn’t make sense to do otherwise. I had a roommate in college who was a gourmet cook and she would say to me, “There is absolutely no reason for food not to taste delicious. No reason.” And I then decided to think about interactions that way. I said, “There’s absolutely no reason for interactions not to be effective.
Preeta: Do you have any examples of any aha moments that you’ve witnessed over the years?

Jeannie: Sure. I worked once, with the general counsel of one of the tech companies who wasn’t particularly spiritual or religious. And I remember I called him a couple of months after we had finished our work together and I asked him, “How are your peers doing?” and he says, “Jeannie, they are being particular jerks. But that just means I get to love them more.” That kind of surprised me. I said, “Hey I’m going to use that -- that’s amazing!” So often somebody will share something that they somehow attribute to me, but it was really our co-created conversation!

There was another story that came up yesterday. I was at the Amtrak station in Philadelphia, traveling from Philadelphia back to Washington DC, many years ago. I was waiting for my train and there was a British couple that was complaining. And I wondered, “Why?” I guess I’d grown up with sensitivity towards other’s needs. So I went up to them and said, “Hey, can I help you?” And the woman said, “It’s my husband. I gave him the portfolio and he left it with our passports, our credit cards and money in the taxi. He always leaves it behind!”

And I looked at her and injected a little humor, I said, “Really? You knew that? You knew that he always loses it -- then why the heck did you give it to him?” “Well,” she says, “Nobody’s going to return it.” I said, “Well you know if I got into the cab next and I found it, I would give it to the taxi driver.” And I turned to the woman next to me and asked, “Hey, what would you do?” and she said, “Oh, I would hand it to the taxi driver.” So I said, “There are two people out of the billions of people on this planet who would actually give it to the taxi driver, so I call into question your hypothesis. So given that there’s a possibility that you'll get your portfolio back, you have to play your role, or else you’re not going to get it back, because of you.” And I said, “Wait in a central location. Have your eyes fixed on the door that he would come in by. He’s going to be waving. And if he comes in waving your portfolio, and you are not there ready to see that, then the reason you’re not getting it is because of you.” I said, “I’m working on this theory of receiving so I’d just love if you try it out for me and see if it works. Because you really don’t have anything to lose.” And I said, “Here’s my number if you need anything when you get to the area; if you need any money, just give me a call.” Well, I took an earlier train and arrived at my parent’s house in Maryland. And a couple of hours later, there’s a phone call that comes to the house. And I’m taking a little nap; my dad answers it and gives me the phone saying, “There’s this British woman on the phone.” And she said, “Put me in your class! I did exactly what you said. I looked and it was like an angel coming through -- the doors opened and a flood of light comes in and there’s that cab driver waving my portfolio, just as you said.”

A similar thing happened to me when my purse was stolen on the train in Geneva and I actually talked the thief into giving it back to me, by using this approach. How they steal your purse on trains is, they have one guy who helps you with your luggage, while the other one steals your purse, while he’s nudging you. Well I nudged him back, which is part of the receiving theory. You give people correct feedback. So I nudged him enough so that he and his partner ended up remaining on the train instead of exiting the train before it took off. So, there I was standing next to the guy who I thought had stolen my purse, right? And so I looked at the door and I kept saying this is what I want, here’s what I want, I don’t need this but I truly want this. Here’s the thing about receiving. People want to give to those who are ready to catch. And so I was explaining in
great detail what it was that I wanted, even to the extent that I told him where to leave my purse, and he did exactly what I asked. A thief! So this represented to me the real power of this approach...

Preeta: That is so brilliant. Let me just ask you - given the contentiousness of this year’s political cycle, what would be your advice to the incoming leaders about how to receive those Americans who are devoutly opposed to them?

Jeannie: Here’s a notion that I often think of. We must be inclusive. Always. It’s my relationship as an elected official to the people I’m representing. The first thing I would ask which would be very helpful, I think, is if people could focus on how they are learning from or being affected by everyone. Instead of worrying that other people like them, or find them likable enough. And that puts me in a whole different world. I’m either in the receptive space or in the judgment space. And I think we fall into that trap very much. So there are ways that we are excluding people when we really don’t realize it. If you are a student in a class and the teacher kind of dismisses somebody’s question, then that actually affects me as a fellow classmate. I’m not going to ask a question then, because I might be treated just like that person. So what we don’t realize is, if I, as a political leader am communicating in a way that feels like I’m excluding even just one person, it’s affecting everybody adversely.

So ways that you can develop this on your cabinet is, when I speak with somebody, I don’t want them to tell me things that they agree with me on. I want to make sure I put on my advisory cabinet, people who are especially different from me, so they can help me see things that I couldn’t see without their help. And I know I felt good when Obama asked Hillary Clinton to be Secretary of State. This was his former rival and he was inviting her to be on his cabinet. And I know they were from the same party and there were reasons for it. But I could also envision another scenario where I wouldn’t want to include somebody who I was so contentious with.

Preeta: To keep learning from everybody, do you have a set of practices that allows you to catch whatever people send and redirect it in the direction you want?

Jeannie: Here’s what I do, I have a bunch of mantras. And I offer them to people and some people offer them to me and I keep a little list. Here are some of the things on it:

Find Something to Like and Like It.

Find Something to Learn and Learn It.

Respect all Others. No Exceptions.

I define respect as my attempting to understand them. No exceptions. And when I'm in a very difficult situation and I think this person is not deserving of respect I say in my head -- “It’s my rule. I already decided this. It’s a decision I already made to respect everyone. No exceptions.” And I hold myself to that. And then, once I'm there just for a couple of minutes, the magic happens and I shift, and my eyesight changes. I don't ever want to leave the situation, until I like that person more. And that means I tell my feet to stay where you are. Find something else to learn, or like, or comment on, or offer. I tell my feet not to move. And that has worked for me so many times.

My goal is to hold myself to being in this space. That's my ultimate goal, so when I
teach people, I say, “I’m teaching it to you, so you can catch me and help me get back in this state when I fall off.” I was teaching this one semester, and then sitting on the airplane going to Lebanon, for the first time. Our plane had been delayed by a couple of hours and there was some turmoil going on, flights got rearranged, but I ended up sitting, next to the only non-Lebanese person on the flight. I thought how unlucky! My first time going to my country, where my roots are. So I looked at the guy and I said, “I have got to find out what to like and like it, or learn something about him.” Turns out, I noticed my bias. And this is the real challenge -- I am biased. Every organization has biases, if they have a human being in there, even just one, right? They are biased. There are biases I have, that I don’t even know I have and it distorts how I make sense of stuff. So I was asking this guy, who I didn’t like yet, what is he? He’s a singer. Opera? He says, “No, more like Frank Sinatra.” And I was judging him, “So he thinks he’s like Frank Sinatra.”

He did a concert last night. I said, “Oh, how many people did you have?” He said, “50,000.” And I heard 5000 because I was harboring judgment eyes, and my judgment eyes distorts what I actually hear. So my perception is not clear, unless I am in this receiving space. So, I still don’t like him. Then I noticed all these kids are walking down the aisle, tall people, little people -- all looking at him. And he says he’s a singer, and I said, “I just saw this show on Celine Dion and she has a couple of managers. You should get a couple of managers.” “Three of them are sitting in the back of the plane and the other two couldn’t get on the plane,” he says. He didn’t look like Kazem Al-Saher, the most famous Middle Eastern singer! His trappings looked very different. And so we are so quick to judge -- even after I just finished teaching a class on how to not be judgmental! But what I ended up doing was inserting my own protocols: Don’t stop until you find something to learn and learn it. And I could have left that plane, not even realizing he was sitting next to me. I asked him if we could take a picture and then when I went to my Lebanese friend’s family, I said, “Guess who I set next to! Kazem Al-Saher!” And they said, “You did not, you did not!” And I said, “Yes, look at this picture!” But see that’s kind of a nice story that I try to remind myself of. That I missed seeing there was gold in front of me, and my job is to see it…

Comments and questions from other participants on the call follow

Aryae: I’m curious about using this approach with young children, in schools. Have you had this experience, or trained teachers?

Jeannie: What a beautiful question, Aryae. That is the goal. I’ve developed a practice in helping little elementary school kids love their bullies. And I have this wonderful voice mail that I’ve saved from my niece who was second grade at the time, and a bully comes up to her and starts falsely accusing her and denying her trial -- that’s how I think of bullying. And she looks at the bully and says, “Can I get back to you tomorrow because I’m going to talk to my Aunt Jeannie and she’s going to tell me how I can respond to you.”

And she called me to talk about the situation, which was basically as silly as these things are -- he was telling her that she pronounced a word incorrectly. So she went back to him and said, “I actually like how you pronounce it, but I just happen to prefer pronouncing it differently.” That’s like a non-sequitur! Then the bully tells her, “Well, I kind of like the way you say it. In fact, I’m going to start saying it that way too!”

Aryae: Jeannie, what about the kind of bully who is maybe 4th or 5th grade, who actually might physically threaten kids on the playground? And there’s a situation where the child might be feeling frightened. Is there a way in your approach, that the child can deal with
this?

Jeannie: I really believe that we often need to enlist and invite the help of other people. When I am most afraid, I go to a senior teacher or principal, and instead of saying that guy is doing something wrong, the child can say, “I am actually afraid to be around the person and this is why.” So instead of saying - the dessert was terrible, I would say, I would really like it if the dessert could be different, or this is how the dessert affects me. And substitute bully for dessert. The magic that takes place is that you will convert that principal into approaching extremely differently the situation and pulling out her own effective response to it.

Aryae: Good. This is a question from Jyoti, in Mountain View. And she writes, “Good to hear you, Jeannie. As always! Any practical suggestions on how to find the courage to be more open, to taking what feels like abuse. Maybe I’m judging, but it is also honoring my feelings.”

Jeannie: Jyoti is one of my old friends! I still remember my first meeting with you. You remember when I said that some of the most discriminating people on this planet Earth are smart women? Very often we are taught as women to do exactly what you were saying - retreat in. I can’t think my way out of this. I can’t convince my head of anything, because it’s already co-opted in this embedded social bias.

And what I need to do in that situation, I believe, is to go right up to the person, almost as though you’re having this out-of-body experience, and you’re observing your own self asking the question of the person who is not treating you respectfully, and say, “Can you help me understand why I feel this way? Can you help me understand why I think you’re dismissing this problem?” My curiosity will then create the courage to help me have this receptive conversation. But I’ve got to go first.

When I was teaching in business schools, I remember one of my students in this very arrogant setting initially said, “You know Jeannie, you have to get us to like you.” And I was trying to really employ these tenets that I had learned about receiving. So I looked at my MBA student and I said, “You know, it doesn't really concern me if you like me. But I care an enormous amount that I like you. How can you help me?” And it’s almost like I became beloved in that instant. It was an instant shift. And I wasn’t asking them to change, I was being affected by what they said, reminding me of something that I truly wanted, and expressing that to them.

Aryae: So going back to Jyoti’s question: how do you find the courage to do that? When somebody is speaking disrespectfully to me, I want to strike at them and put them down. How do I find the courage to respond in a different way? What do you do inside yourself?

Jeannie: I basically adapt a mantra. When I was at Stanford, I had a mantra: “Respect everybody. No exceptions.” So I would have to apply it to that very person. I would have to respect them. So shift my inner focus. I still have these negative thoughts and beliefs about this person. I'm not saying get rid of those. Stop looking in that direction. And shift just a little bit over. And look for ways in which you could hear them. Kind of a rule of thumb is: if I want to be heard, then let me figure out how I can hear. Demonstrate hearing. If I want to be loved, let me figure out how I can love right now. So using what I am lacking as a guide to say, “let me be exactly that.”
Aryae: That’s very helpful. Our next question is from Maya in Maryland and is “What are some effective techniques to relay to people that you are ready to receive?”

Jeannie: What a wonderful question. But inherent in your question is a little bit of a catch-22 situation. l&m not trying to convince them of anything, including my interest in being receptive, because it turns out -- that very thought gets me out of being receptive. I know this is extremely subtle, but I must focus on techniques that make me want to love you more. In other words, I have to be what I call modifiable, instead of trying to prove l&m modifiable.

This happened in my business school. There's a guy, a couple seats away from me who wasn't very popular, I think, and at the time he was asked to speak. And everyone started talking over him, including the professor. And I just leaned forward, looked at him, called him by name, and said, “I would like to hear what you have to say. Will you please continue?”

And that fueled him. And he started talking in a commanding way. Everybody was silenced. I didn't think anything of it, until ten years later; I met the same guy in an airplane. And he said, “Jeannie, I don't even remember that class. I don't remember the comment but I remember how you made me feel.” And he told me that the trajectory of his life was different because of that incident. So it is a small act of kindness, much like Mother Teresa would say -- Do small acts with great love.

I often like to tell myself -- love will not get me there, only great love will. Which means the only people I have to love, are those people that are not loving towards me. Everybody else can handle it, by themselves. It's almost like I'm doing triage for the world. It's the people who are the most unloving who are the most in need of my loving them.

Aryae: Beautiful. And speaking of Love, here is a note from Mish in New York. She says, “On the subject of receiving, so it comes down to faith. Faith that what you ask for or need in a situation, will happen or come to you. I aspire to be a giver, a giver of love, a giver of good vibes, and a giver of strength.”

Jeannie: Yeah. Beautiful! Thank you for that. And I would add it's not just what I get; it changes what I want as well...

Aryae: So here's the last question in the queue. This is from Anush. “What are some practices that help you become aware and focus on listening deeply. How do you do this in a business setting?”

Jeannie: One strategy I use in business settings is having a goal like this -- I need to be able to write something down that I learned from this meeting, that I didn't even know, I didn't know.

Even if I don't write anything down, it is going to change how I listen and how I talk. And unknowingly, unbeknownst to myself, l&m going to go first. l&m going to shift myself into this receptive state of being, not because I'm cognitively trying to prove it, but because I have another want. I have to learn something from you that I didn't even know you were going to tell me. And that seems to be a sufficient initiating move. That is just one idea...

Preeta: Jeannie, this is been so rich and so beautiful. In ServiceSpace we talk a lot about
inner transformation and your entire theory is about that. How can I change myself? How can I change the way in which I perceive the situation, to shift the energy? How has your work and research changed you, if at all?

Jeannie: I was rereading my dissertation when you had asked me for it, and I noticed the last of my acknowledgments; it said this research has changed me. I see with different eyes. And I give myself permission more to go first, because one of the things that I realized is that people are doing the best they can. It’s very easy for me to understand where I can’t know something. I can’t know what you want. The big aha moment for me was when I realized the other person is in the same predicament. And probably has similar needs for the interaction that I do. So I use my inner voice.

If I’m the boss, I can ask my subordinate, “I would like to know if you have any ideas?” Or if I were the subordinate, I could say, “Would it be okay, if I shared with you some of my thoughts?” So it doesn’t matter which side of the interaction you are on, if I am in the know, it’s on me to be invitational.

Aryae: Beautiful, thank you. So here’s the final question: How can we, as the ServiceSpace community, support you and your work?

Jeannie: What a beautiful offer. I feel as though that I am just one member of this team, this receiving team. I would be so honored if everyone who has an inkling of an interest in this could join this team of helping to shape this message. My goal is to have stories of people courageous enough to say, "You know what. I have this version 1 that I am doing, and maybe I’ll just email Jeannie to see if I can approach it in a version 2 kind of way." I am very interested in creating a platform where we can all encourage each other, by our own attempts to decide to be receptive. It is really an attempt. All I have to do is decide that I want to try it and that gets me there. I would be so honored if I could have a way of keeping in touch with those who are interested and engaging in an interaction and a discussion.

Aryae: What would be the best way? If anyone is interested, should they just email you?

Jeannie: I’m thinking that there might even be someone out there, who might be able to talk with me and others about even creating a space on the web, that we can have -- a joint meeting space that we can actually enter into conversation about this, with examples and questions that I would be happy to answer, for the benefit of anybody else who is reading it. Email would be a great start. Please email me. I would be delighted to hear from you.

Aryae: Beautiful. You’ve put out what you want and opened yourself to the invitation.

Jeannie: Thank you. I’m so grateful for this conversation and this opportunity to meet you all virtually.

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For more inspiration join the upcoming Awakin Call this Saturday with Doug Powers, a professor and former high school teacher whose lifework is dedicated to "Cultivating and Teaching Freedom". RSVP info and more details here.