



Meaningful Living Newsletter

Issue 21, August 2016

Couples? Or just travelling in the same direction? by Karina Stell

My great love is couples work. From the moment I saw my first couple, it had me. Two people who at one moment loved each other enough to commit to be together as a very unique unit throughout life. And then to come to a place where neither can really look at each other without feeling some type of pain. How does this happen? Being divorced myself after 30 years of marriage, I know what it feels like in that very private place of unhappiness when the door closes on the outside world. But how it gets that way is the most important question.

Can relationships be doomed from the start by making the wrong choice for the wrong reasons? Perhaps. But more often than not, couples in those wonderful moments when they realise they are in love and want to commit to this person, fail to have the important conversations. I certainly did. Couples experiencing this immense love for another human being, don't seem to want to taint it with difficult questions that may dampen the euphoria they are feeling. Here, I believe, the seeds for those very sad times that can arise, are laid.

These conversations are so very important. Most important of all, to have with ourselves. They take us to the places that we find the essence of who we are,

what we bring to the relationship, what we care about. I call this the first P of relationships. Priorities. Let's talk about what matters to you. What do each part of the couple want their life to look like? Who am I in this relationship? Such an important question. What kind of man or woman do I want to be? What kind of identity does our union have? What do we want to be known for? How do I want my partner to feel in this relationship – not just today – but in an ongoing way.

Add to these questions, more practical discussions about money, children, work, family. What does the ideal look like to you? So very important and the answers can be so different for everyone.

We work with these conversations in our couple's sessions. Often the ideal for each is so different. Where do we go then? We try and find how much each is prepared to move to make their partner feel loved, important and cared for without abandoning themselves. This is the work of relationships – a lifetime effort to compromise and hear what is going on for the other and to make sure **they know it matters**. This is what makes a couple. A unit that is NOT just travelling life in the same direction, but two people who are willing to work with each other, toward commonly cared about outcomes.

The second P is Process. How do we plan on doing it? Like in all of our work, our focus is on what we are responsible for. If we see our partner unhappy, hurt, disconnected, what part might I have played in that? What is needed from me? Be curious – this is the person you love.

Often couples half-do Process. It's not for the faint hearted. It relies on each to be able to hear challenging things, things that have not been their experience but have been true for their partner. There is a temptation for defensiveness and blame. **THIS IS NOT USEFUL PROCESS.** When a person has had an experience that is real for them, they need to know it matters.

Process is the key to the change that comes about. It is the practical part of loving your partner. As Michael often reminds us all, love is a verb. What do you do to show your partner that they are loved? There is no way to overstate the importance of Process. It is where you put your Priorities on the line. Do you live what you say is important? Yes, its work. But happy couples are not just lucky. They have worked at it and shown each other how much they matter to one another in an ongoing way.

The final P is Performance. This is a question for each of us in relationships.

is very important and is part of the discovery in this type of work.

Examining our performance in our relationships, really tests if we are living authentically. It may well lead to our Priorities shifting, our Process being more meaningful and our Performance being

***Are we a couple? Or are we just travelling
life in the same direction?***

1. Build three pens and put three pigs in each. Then build a fourth pen around the other three.
2. Only objects with consecutive repeated letters may pass.
3. The father is 40 and the son is 10.
4. The men were piloting a plane that crashed.
5. His son.

PANPHISES	
NICENNOCTO	
DETTUGIRA	
EPCINTEA	
SNLEGFIE	
WEHNI	
LATHEGRU	
TAINYXE	
CEAPECCCTNA	
STUJ ENCIOT	
HOHTUTG	
TUNIQTARLYI	
HEETARB	
NAIP	
DOFCOTSIMR	
PINCA	

Whom is the 'ouch' for? Part 347

BY Michael Cohn

In the beginner's mind
there are many possibilities,
but in the experts
there are few.

-Shunryu Suzuki

<http://www.realizingyourcreativelife.com>

Before I write Part 347 of this blog, I'd like you to reflect on Part 346 and Part 345.

Which one did you enjoy more?

Are you wondering where Part 346 and Part 345 are?

Are you about to fling this blog away in disgust or irritation?

So, why don't you?

Why do you continue to read something that doesn't quite make sense to you or to continue with something that might irritate you?

These questions might sound really weird, but the fact is that if you are actually reading this now, something has piqued your attention.

Well, therapy should be something like this. It should engage and catalyse very real visceral feelings, as opposed to mere intellectual insights.

So, before I continue, may I ask you for permission to drop Part 5 or Part 474 of these blogs and just get on with it?

Therapy is an engagement between two people and it is the very real, attentive, caring I-Thou between two

people who both are struggling with life, perhaps in different ways, but each is trying to do the best they can in an uncertain world.

The therapeutic relationship has been described as a relationship between two people, both of whom have problems, one who has fewer problems than the other, and that one, one hopes, is the therapist!

If that sounds scary, be scared and intrigued perhaps, but hold it as very important and very real. All a therapist can do is to hold the space open for another, and really engage in a caring, mindful way, with the issues that are brought into the room.

There are no experts in the world of the psyche. At best, a therapist may be able to engage meaningfully with a client, merely because they may have made a few steps further in their own journey. They share their truth and offer it tentatively for emotional consideration rather than intellectual consideration.

Talk therapy really should be called 'listen therapy', with the therapist really just listening and feeling and experiencing, and then tentatively offering back to the client, the therapist's own emotional responses.

That's it.

Tentative and uncertain.

Paradoxically, no therapist should ever try to 'understand' their client.

That's heresy I know, because almost by very definition, listening should be an attempt to understand the other person. And especially therapists whose very calling is to try to understand.

But the danger in understanding is that it often may stifle further curiosity. Of course a therapist should try to understand a client in order to try to enter their world, but the moment a therapist feels that they 'understand', their job is to un-understand, to not know, to remain ever curious, to totally eschew a

‘diagnosis’ or a ‘hypothesis’. The danger of the diagnosis or of ‘knowing’ or of ‘understanding’, is that it instantly locks both therapist and client into a ‘known’ paradigm and instantly a whole host of biases begin to intrude into what once was an open and vital exciting engagement. The Buddhists talk of ‘beginner’s mind’, a fertile place of not-knowing, which allows for all sorts of being and experience to unfold, anew.

Very often, I am asked questions in a session, questions which can be answered either with a ‘wise’ answer, or a trite and simplistic platitude.

I often choose neither option, eschewing platitudes in favour of silence, or eschewing my own ‘wisdom’ in favour of my clients’ own wisdom. They know much more about themselves than I do – they should find their own answers.

In ending, I should emphasise just how amazing I really am as a therapist. In place of my brilliant summations, notions, nostrums, and exquisite interpretations, I leave them unsaid. I bite my tongue and choke off my clevernesses, hypotheses, and witticisms so that my clients get to do the work for themselves. Sometimes I’m amazed at how silent I sometimes can be in session.

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For those of you who don't follow us on Facebook – just some treasures from this month:

It should never be this difficult 😊 just listen 😊



Respecting differences.....everyone has their own happy place <3

