

REJECTIVENESS AND TRANSPARENCY

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Transparency

WRITTEN BY

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“It is always easier for me to solve your problems than for me to solve my own and it is easier for you to solve mine than it is for you to solve your own”

Peter Fleming

The Material that is briefly outlined in this paper has been, in many ways, the hardest for me to have accepted. Other parts of the contribution Training have run into disagreement, none as much as the joint notions that first our skill and drive in healing social and emotional hurt is grounded in the pain we ourselves feel when we have been rejected by others. Secondly that to be effective as practitioners we need to let the people whom we are helping see that pain.

The burden of being Opaque

People may feel and fear that being transparent is a burden. I want to suggest that a far greater burden is the usual one of having to assume a strength, a confidence, a sureness that doesn't exist. Without criticism, hopefully with both compassion and understanding, let me say that we all know that practitioners in the helping professionals aren't sure, strong, altogether. They, we have the crises and the pain that characterise any life. In fact there are some crises and hurts to which we may be particularly prone, a function of being in tune with and working in emotional world.

Social workers, parole officers, psychiatrists, the clergy, teachers, to name some of us, simply are not a group that lacks problems around intimacy, marriage, raising children, escapism, commitments to jobs, mate, children and addictions. They do though feel a need to hide their problems, both from those to whom they provide a service and to the world at large. This hiding, this opaqueness is a burden. This burden is certainly known to immediate family and friends. They may experience the burden directly or indirectly but they do know its presence and its weight. The burden may be seen directly in that someone they care about is dissatisfied, bitter and unfulfilled in his or her job. Or the burden may come out indirectly as unpredictable anger, coldness, sexual deadness or excessive neediness and within the circle of opaqueness those close to the practitioner feel that there is nothing they can do to help. If I won't let my clients or patients in, it is likely that in some significant ways I won't let my family or friends in either.

Let me briefly outline the basic dynamic: the talent to care and heal is based on our rejectiveness; to be able to claim and use our rejectiveness we need to allow ourselves to feel pain when we are rejected by others; to feel that pain we need to let others see our vulnerability to that pain, rejectiveness cannot be experienced alone, or with one or two other people. To be vulnerable we need to be transparent. If we cannot be transparent we cut off the source of our talent, our rejectiveness and when we do that we begin to become ineffective. Because we cannot be vulnerable feelings of ineffectiveness must be covered up

by a veneer of strength. In covering up our ineffectiveness we find a deep seated guilt. That guilt too must be covered. So we become more opaque and hence less effective. We then carry the burden of having to appear effective, strong, confident, when in fact we are becoming increasingly unsure of ourselves.

This cycle is both self-defeating and self-diminishing. It has killed some, destroyed others and pushed people out of a field of work where I would want to insist they in fact belong.

Graduate schools and professional models are prone to teach and condition students and practitioners how to maintain power, not how to care. These schools and models so often encourage the fearful and the ineffective to establish systems within which they will not be threatened, hence opacity. However I would like to resist the temptation to be critical and rather invest my energies in developing alternatives to that which is so easily open to a critical attack. I do not want to claim that transparency is original to Contribution Training, like so much of Contribution Training the theory of transparency is simply codified common sense. Often practitioners with common sense know how to be what I call transparent, whether they are doing it consciously or unconsciously and whether they are placing a label on that activity, mine or their own. But while some people have this common sense some do not. No-one has all of common sense around wisdom there is the fact that professional education, professional conventions and professional models all have visible tendency to drain off some of the wisdom and common sense a person has acquired through life and through experience. Some people have the strength and tenacity to try to block that drain, but we are not all that perceptive or persistent. Often a young psychiatrist student has some of the potency that lies in transparency – only to lose it after twenty years practice.

The tool presented here is aimed at teaching something some of us had and were afraid to own, some of us had lost, some of us never had. Practitioners who are effective and make full use of their talent may not need this tool.

Transparency isn't letting you see me naked

I don't have to tell you my deepest darkest secrets. I don't have to take off my clothes; I don't have to let you see my soul. Transparency is letting you see me as a person, letting you see who I am. That may mean saying that I will not tell you my darkest secret; telling you I'd be terribly embarrassed to take my clothes off; telling you that there are parts of my soul I don't, can't and won't share with anyone. Transparency does mean encouraging and helping you to see me as a person with strengths and weaknesses just as you are a person with strengths and weaknesses. Transparency may mean telling you, who are my client or patient or student when I am angry or irritated or intimidated or envious of you.

The Tao of Strength and Weakness

One of the foundations of the theory of transparency is the paradox that often we are seen by others as strong when we perceive ourselves as weak and seen as weak when we are perceiving ourselves as most strong. We cannot know when the paradox is operating because we do not and cannot know ourselves completely. We are often surprised, even very surprised when we hear our voice played back on a tape recorder, or see our picture on a video screen.

We are not familiar with our own voice or appearance as we are with the voices and appearances of others. There are parts of us that we do not know as well as others know and furthermore we should not try to. If a person is charming, to consciously try to know that charm will destroy it. A person who is consciously charming is unappealing, not appealing. There is a similar dynamic at work in whether we are seen by others as strong or weak, confident or uncertain.

Often we hide our weaknesses and uncertainties and imagine the world is seeing us as strong. However the act of hiding is in fact seen by others and thus diminishes the extent we are seen as strong. Once the act of hiding is seen then we are not known as strong. Someone may not know what we are hiding but know we are hiding something.

A client, patient, student who is troubled by social and emotional pain will have sensitivity to that pain in others. He or she will have an ability to clearly see where real strength lies and where strength is a façade to hide weakness and inadequacy. The person will not trust when he or she senses the act of hiding. The motions of trusting may occur but the commitment to deep trusting from which real healing of social and emotional hurt springs, will not.

For a surgeon to effectively set a broken arm you don't need a trust his emotions or his soul. For a psychiatrist or a social worker or priest or therapist to heal your broken emotions or soul you do. The psychiatrist, the social worker, the therapist and yes, the priest will tend to be people who have fears of hopes around their adequacy, sexuality, strength and security. It is these fears and concerns that motivate them to enter the field, it is in these fears that their talent to heal is rooted.

As a consequence the clients, patients and students are going to tend to be experts at picking precisely that hiding which the practitioner is most inclined to do. This may not be conscious, it is often on an unconscious level that the person receiving the service feels that something is missing, something does not add up. The smiling professional fools no-one with the smile when the smile is consciously hiding, tiredness, boredom, anger, insecurity or irritation. The intent of the smile is to convey caring and confidence, it is usually seen by the patient or client as patronising, if not disinterest. I need to patronise you precisely when I do not care about you and do not have much confidence in you. Letting the person who is the client or patient see and experience the tiredness, the boredom, the anger is a compliment. Then you are strong enough to cope with my real feelings even if I am bored or angry with

you and I care enough about you so that I don't know that just because I am bored, or angry now doesn't mean that it is all of our relationship.

If I patronise you I diminish you and reduce the well of my own caring. If I run the risk of being honest with you all I have to lose is this one time which may not go well, but I am building the basis of trust. I am signalling to you that when I smile you can believe it.

Transparency and Equality

The purpose of opaqueness is to maintain superiority. Perhaps the healing and management of physical hurt requires superiority. Perhaps the healing of spiritual agony requires superiority and an unequal relationship between clergy and congregation, between guru and following. I'm not at all convinced of the necessity of these superiorities but I will here retreat from a confrontation with these three power structures to concentrate on my discomforts with my own field.

If healing is to happen in social and emotional fields some equality is crucial. It is simply not possible to adopt the superiority of a medicine man or a medical doctor and be effective. Also where practitioners have tried they have been tragically or comically ineffective. Superiority doesn't work, it is that simple.

Social and emotional growth happens when person touches person. That equal touching is the crucial ingredient. For person to touch person we need a person to person equality. Transparency creates that equality without detracting from my skills, which I need if I am to teach and help you. We can be equal and I can have something special, insightful, powerful to offer you, to bring to you. We are equal because I have feelings, involvements and dilemmas too and we are equal because I don't have to hide them from you. At times I may choose to hide them from you but I don't have to. Furthermore I can tell you when I am hiding. That too is transparency. I don't have to hide that I have something to learn from you. To paraphrase William James: I believe in transparency because I haven't yet met the person who doesn't have something to teach me.

The elitism in the psychiatric and therapeutic fields, like other elites has created guilt, ineffectiveness, burden and corruption, as well as the loss of faith and trust. Like other elites, this particular one has caused laziness and resulted in a lack of rigour. Vigour and challenging new blood is kept out, mine for one, David Pellin for another. The appearance of change and growth is often more important than the reality of change and growth. Again a place where the elitism of the helping professionals is like other political economic and educational elites.

The elite we are looking at here doesn't work; otherwise the "best" universities would be turning out the best practitioners and that simply is not that case. The best universities turn out people who make the most money, who have the most successful careers, who feed the

elite. They cannot claim and will not claim to turn out the most talented, most caring and most healing practitioners because their purpose is to maintain and feed the elite, the apparently best schools in the field of social and emotional hurt often reduce the healing talent of the students and graduates.

It is possible in this day and age for an elite to be transparent because then they would have to be prepared to allow others to see how very concerned they are to have and to maintain their superior power and privilege.

Transparency for an elite would mean saying or modelling; I have this power and these privileges. I want to keep them, I will fight to keep them even if that means keeping you down. As a client, a patient or a student you will help to keep me in my power. We are mutually committed to a system in which I am up and you down.

Power and privilege are addictions that are hard to give up. However the withdrawal is not all that painful and the payoff relatively quick. Like quitting smoking it is hard to do but you end up feeling better and having more energy. You are not polluting the environment and being a toxic model for younger people.

Am I Afraid?

Transparency is a continual struggle. Like fidelity in marriage, honesty in politics, faith in religion it would be easier to be seduced and yet one thing does make it easier and that is to realise just how much courage in expressing themselves we do ask of our clients and patients, how much transparency we demand of them. So why not me? and if not me, who?
