

**This Appreciative Hour:
July 8, 2009 Open Mic Re-cap...and More**

Open Mic: The Harvest What happens when 27 people gather for four days, to have conversations that matter -- to themselves, their clients, their professions? Well, it's kind of like OM, but with four days of increasing deepening and enlivening. Five of us who were at the recent *Art of Hosting* event in Gold Lake, CO debriefed the other Open Mic participants about it, and we all spoke more deeply and authentically as a result. I wonder how that relates to your own needs and aspirations, and to the conversations you seek to have. Read on.

But wait – there's more! If you're interested in the uses and joys of journaling, read “**Ed's Further Reflections**” at the end.

July 8 Open Mic Re-cap:

I opened by describing **Open Mic** as a kind of circle gathering around a virtual campfire, much as humans have gathered since the first fire. I see OM as a place for conversations that both ground and inspire all of us, so that we can journey out into our world more resourced, inspired, and joyful. Moreover, I see OM as a place to learn how to have conversations like these elsewhere. (It's *great* if OM is a high point of your week. It's *insanely great* if OM helps you to have more of them during the week.)

With that in mind, I am opening each OM with a different centering practice so that you can accumulate a toolkit of ways that work for you, in centering yourself and in inviting those with whom you're in conversation (clients, colleagues, family members, others) to be bring more presence, trust, and authenticity to the dialogue. The last Open Mic featured a gratitude exercise. Today I introduced a two-minute guided meditation adapted from *Seven Whispers: A Spiritual Practice for Times like These*, by Christina Baldwin, one of the leaders of the Art of Hosting. Here's a synopsis:

Letting Go: take three or four deep, cleansing breaths. As you do, let go of the tensions of the day, the calls to be returned, the timelines you may feel chained to. Just enjoy the journey of the breath through your body, and feel noise and cares subside.

Be Here: now take three or four natural breaths, and note the sounds, smells, tastes, and other sensations around and within you. Tune into your inner and outer environments. Really “arrive” here.

Now What? As you continue your natural breathing, ask yourself, “What do I want the next conversation to mean, to myself and others? How am I called to ‘show up’ in it? How can I bring my highest and best self to this conversation?”

OM participants said that, as a result of this two-minute drill, they: were more fully present; felt joy and laughter; slowed down; relaxed, let go of multi-tasking; felt the spaciousness of the whole world make itself available.

The Art of Hosting (AoH):

"Isolated and alone, we lose courage and capacity, we end up with unending fatigue and loneliness ... Wisdom exists not just in each of us but in all of us. We learn that the wisdom we need to solve our problems is available when we talk together."

This quote from Margaret Wheatley, author of numerous books on conversation and change is how Elizabeth Jetton begins "Gather Your Clients for Community Conversations" in an upcoming *Solutions* magazine. Read her excellent article on hosting conversations, at <http://www.fpanet.org/PracticeManagement/PracticeSolutionsMagazine/JulyAugust09/GatherYourClientsforCommunityConversations/>

Elizabeth writes: "When times are tough people want to be together. In isolation there grows a sense of frustration and impotence in all of us. When we get together for a rich conversation, we can tap into our resilience, our hopes and our connectedness." That's a good description of our times, and of what took place in Gold Lake.

Several OM participants wanted to know they missed. Dick Wagner, one of the 'callers' of the event, described AoH as comprising different ways of holding important conversations, and noted that the event was called to discuss the future role of the financial planning profession, possible directions for new professions dealing with money, and the future of money. (No small purposes!) Dick compellingly described Gold Lake as "a jewel in my personal crown," with which many GL visitors probably can identify. Others spoke of experiencing the AoH questions as being profound and provocative, and of having been inspired by the generosity of those present at AoH, both during and since. Many of us noted that we hadn't known what to expect, and were pleased that the conversations were not technical or abstract. They led us to deeply personal places from which we could touch our aspirations for our work and our lives, and begin to craft our individual and collective visions for our work.

It was noted that the AoH process doesn't "just happen." There is a design unique to each event, but is drawn from approaches which have a common root in cultivating deep presence, summoning the wisdom and intelligence of the group and its members, and being "pulled by the future which calls us," rather than looking to the future as a linear extrapolation of the present. These approaches include: meeting in circle (or council); world café; open space technology; appreciative inquiry (which didn't happen to be used in this event); and similar approaches. (For more info, see www.Berkana.org.) Many - perhaps all -of us left Gold Lake with an intention to host conversations in our communities and our work, using some or all of the approaches we experienced and practiced.

The five of us who had been at Gold Lake realized that our descriptions were somewhat amorphous (kind of like Woodstock; "You had to *be there*, man!"), and resolved to find ways to communicate more of the specific directions that the group, and individuals within it, are exploring. I sense much interest among planners in attending such events, and predict that more AoH iterations will be called. For any readers who wish to learn more, contact me and I'll point you in the right directions.

Following the discussion of our experience, I asked each of the five persons who hadn't been there to share their reflections. Each seemed intrigued, and perhaps moved, by our reports. A first-time OM participant (our first from Canada; what's been *keeping* them?!) spoke compellingly of his desire to move the financial planning agenda forward, in a way which addresses what he sees as much unprofessional financial planning. The other "newbie" noted his delight in awakening people to the role of money in helping achieve "the ambitions of their heart." He related taking joy in guiding people in "untying the knots of alienation" (he was our poet-in-residence today) and seeing them move towards practical actions, and found the idea of "hosting" appealing. Another spoke of wondering how hosting can enhance his work with financial literacy, in getting consumers to have productive money conversations; another is dealing with questions of where he wants to be and how he wishes to contribute through his work, and noted that he would have liked to be there at Gold Lake, to explore those deep questions.

Ed's Further Reflections:

One of the "off-the-balance-sheet" joys of Gold Lake was re-discovering **journaling**. Christina Baldwin generously offered to host a journaling session before breakfast one morning, down by the lake. Christina is a pioneer of the modern journaling movement, having published her first book on it some 35 years ago (http://www.amazon.com/Storycatcher-Making-Sense-through-Practice/dp/1577316037/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1247165103&sr=1-2)

She led six of us in two five-minute "flow writing" segments, in which we gazed at the surroundings, wrote of what we were seeing, and let our pens take it from there. She then guided us in writing (for 25 minutes) a story about ourselves, using the third person. We began the first sentence with "*Once upon a time, a man (a woman)...*" I was stunned at how effortlessly and gratifyingly I fell into this writing, rediscovered a writing voice that had lain dormant for a few years, and wrote stuff whose depth stunned me. I'm sure that the entire environment played a role in guiding my writing to a deep place. I knew that I would resume a morning journaling practice back home, which I have faithfully done since then (very grounding, sometimes very revealing, always very useful). Moreover, I have begun to experiment with a two-minute journaling period before each phone appointment, instead of doing breath meditation. Both types of "two-minute drills" are useful and grounding. However, there's something about the kinesthetic experience of placing pen on paper and letting my fingers do the walking; cares and preoccupations seem to flow out of me through the tip of the pen, inviting something higher to flow in and reveal itself. I think of journaling as my "writing meditation."

Additionally, I sometimes use a one-minute journaling exercise after a coaching or other conversation, to capture the high points. I label the summary "**Harvesting the Fruits,**" and let my pen write what was important and memorable. It works!

Please write me about your own centering practices and what they do for you. (Maybe I'll include them in future OMs.) And plan to join us next **Wednesday, July 15, at 5:00 eastern. 1-219-509-8322, code 202779#**. See you there?

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