

October 28, 2009 Open Mic Recap:

Highlights: A flowing and delightful hour for the group of us that convened around our virtual OM campfire. We spoke about letting go, Tai Chi, a thorny client impasse, and a remarkable story about Yitzhak Perlman and the music that's in each of us. Coming Attractions: Please put two Open Mics on your November calendar. Wed. Nov 18 at 5:00 pm eastern, and a special pre-Thanksgiving OM, on Tuesday, Nov. 24 at Noon.

Open Mic Recap:

Centering Practice: As always, I led a brief body-centered meditation. Most found it calming and centering. One participant, however, found it hard, noting that "Letting go is difficult;" by which he meant quieting the barking voices of the to-do's that are yammering for his attention. Another participant likened the barking-dog challenge to the Tai Chi form known as the Fighting Form: a two-person constant connection with one's adversary, in which you never lose contact and remain "centered and soft." He called it a 'soft dance.' (Check out <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RChfK8uZM90> for a homey video demonstration.) As you read this Recap, please reflect on this question; are you on a 'soft-dancing' basis with *your* barking dogs, or do they have the upper hand?

Or are you a Barking-Dog Whisperer? If you haven't watched The Dog Whisperer, you have a treat in store. Cesar Millan is a genius who practices and preaches "calm, assertive energy;" he says that he trains humans, and rehabilitates dogs. (See his website, <http://www.cesarmillaninc.com/>, for more.) I wonder how we might practice calm, assertive energy with our inner barking dogs. Any thoughts about it, out there?

A Vexing Client Impasse: A planner asked for help in "reframing how I'm working with a client couple." She has been feeling challenged in helping these clients through an impasse in finalizing their financial plan. They are in their early 60's, with significant inheritance (on wife's side) and a good earnings history (on both). He is still working, and she retired several years ago. The impasse concerns the wife's wish for her husband to be independent of her financial assets, "and not be dependent on me." As you might infer, there's more to the story, including the wife's concern about her husband's being "foot-loose with money" and fear that he'll cause their money to run out. The planner feels wrung out after each client meeting, and has instructed her staff "to schedule me only one like them per day."

I asked her what feelings arose as she told her story: "Stuck; un-confident. It's their work to do, but I bear some responsibility for the outcome. I get down on myself about it, sometimes." I then asked her, "When you approach it from wisdom, rather than 'stuckness,' what does wisdom say?" (Lest that question sound unduly woo-woo: I know this planner very well, and know that she is awesomely talented. So I felt completely confident in posing that question.) "To be gentle with myself; be patient with the process; I have opened up something between them...wait and see what develops...and wait for my own wisdom to arise." I remarked that the planner herself is at a critical point in the planning relationship with this couple. I posed the choice she is facing as "Playing Nice

versus Going Deeper.” She agreed. Then I asked if we might turn to the others for their thoughts, and she readily agreed.

One planner asked her: “What if the gender roles were reversed (and it was the husband’s financial resources being spent down)?” She found this a great question, and wanted to let it soak in. Another noted that when he has a client couple in a significant transition, he often asks: “If money weren’t the issue, how would you lead your lives?” He added that this question often leads to important conversations and breakthroughs. She (and I) thought it was a great contribution. I added that it reminded me of a question from Structured Process Therapy: “If this problem were magically solved (or simply went away), how would you then feel?” The value in this latter question is for the client to experience relief and other feelings. The planner can then have them “file away” those feelings as a vivid beacon or North Star, to give them the faith that something valuable is awaiting them if they can muster the courage, patience, and tenacity to work it through.

At this point, she felt she had received valuable insights (including self-insights) and could take it from there.

Making Music With What You Have Left I then read a story I had recently been sent via email, that I found inspiring and wanted to share. Here it is:

Yitzhak Perlman, the great violinist, was playing in New York. Perlman was crippled by polio as a young child, so the bottom part of his body doesn't work well and he wears these very prominent leg braces and comes on in crutches, in a very painful, slow way, hauling himself across the stage. Then he sits down and, very carefully, unbuckles the leg braces and lays them down, puts down his crutches, and then picks up his violin. This night the audience had watched him slowly, painfully, walk across the stage; and he began to play. About a third of the way through the piece, suddenly there was a loud noise in the hall that signaled that one of his four strings on his violin had just snapped.

Everyone expected that they would be watching Perlman put back the leg braces, walk slowly across the stage, and find a new violin. But this is what happened. Yitzhak Perlman closed his eyes for a moment. He paused. And then he signaled for the conductor to begin again. And he began from where they had left off. And here's the description of his playing, from Jack Riemer in the **Houston Chronicle**:

"He played with such passion, and such power, and such purity, as people had never heard before. Of course, everyone knew that it was impossible to play this symphonic work with three strings. I know that. You know that. But that night, Yitzhak Perlman did not know that. You could see him modulating, changing, recomposing the piece in his head. At one point, it sounded like he was de-tuning the strings to get new sounds from them that they had never made before. When he finished, there was an awe-filled silence in the room. And then people rose and cheered. Everyone was screaming and cheering and doing everything we could to show how much we appreciated what he had just done. He smiled. He wiped the sweat from his brow. He raised his bow to us. And then he said, not boastfully, but in a quiet and pensive and reverent tone,

"You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left."

I asked what this story brought up for listeners:

“Awe”;
“A roller-coaster ride;”
“Inspiration; not discouraging at all;”
“Horror...panic...inspiration;”
“Excitement at his incredible level of patience;”
“Inspiring, that he could be released into himself, into his own magic.”

Me, too; all of the above. What about you?

One listener noted that the theme of *“how much music you have left”* is pertinent to how we can help clients as they go into different eras of their lives; how they find and develop strengths they may not know they had, as some other faculties diminish. I thought it was a great point. It reminds me of something I read by Jay Haley long ago, about the late Milton Erickson, a brilliant psychiatrist. As Erickson aged and could no longer walk, he fine-tuned his therapeutic mastery to the point where a simple, well-timed phrase often led to a significant client breakthrough. Haley likened this jewel-like skill to other artists as they aged, and cited Pablo Picasso and Pablo Casals as examples. Applying Haley’s message to my own situation, if I do Open Mics for another decade or two, perhaps these Recaps will get shorter. (One can only hope.)

Checking Out: As always, I asked for a brief phrase to capture how the hour was for attendees:

“What wisdom and what thinking in this group!”
“Appreciation for the insights.”
“Inspiring.”
“Appreciation for the hour of centering.”
“Neat.”

Yes, incredibly neat. Can you stand even more neatness? Join us again for Open Mic on Wednesday, November 18 at 5:00 pm eastern. And then again for a Special Pre-Thanksgiving Open Mic, on TUESDAY, November 24 at Noon eastern. Share gritudes even before Turkey Thursday, tell us how you’ll be celebrating Thanksgiving, and get help figuring out how to deal with your strange Uncle Max or Aunt Velma, who will be joining you. Will that be neat, or what?

Ed
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