

**This Appreciative Hour:  
Recap of October 14, 2009 Open Mic**

**Please Note:  
Next Open Mic is October 28 @ Noon eastern time.**

***Oct. 14 OM Highlights:***

*A small group of us pulled up our virtual chairs to our virtual table. Our actual, non-virtual conversation centered on the theme of taking care of ourselves – both for its own sake (or for our own sake) and also to increase our capacity for taking care of others. The emerging conversational threads revealed themselves, with me exerting what I hope was gentle guidance rather than forcing or leading the way to a pre-ordained goal.*

**The Recap:**

For our ***brief centering practice*** (less than one minute), I invited callers to take several deep, cleansing breaths, and then become aware of an area of their body that felt calm and spacious. Rather than trying to un-knot more tense areas, I suggested that we each focus on that calm-spacious area, get to know its qualities well, savor them, and see what happens. People reported feeling more relaxed, calm, and expansive. I explained that there is much evidence, from research and practice, that if we attention on what's already working well or "just right" in our life and work, we often find that it grows and expands: like a Reverse Gresham's Law, in which the "good stuff" can drive out the "bad," without our focusing undue attention on the latter. By extension, perhaps it's possible to expand our calm presence by focusing on even the smallest instance of it, savor it, and allow it to expand. Try it for yourself; see if that's the way it works for you.

***FPA Anaheim Reprise:*** one of the callers had attended the annual FPA bash, and reported that although attendance was down from usual levels, it was largely an upbeat and optimistic gathering. He cited Bert Jacobs' (the CEO of Life Is Good, purveyor of T-shirts and more) keynote on his optimistic view of the world. (Jacobs bills himself as the *Chief Optimism Officer*. You don't see many job postings on Monster.com for that kind of C.O.O.) Our faithful reporter also attended and relished Carol Anderson and Ben Coombs' stellar presentation on Planner for the Latter Years. Several days later, I got confirmation from an independent and objective source (Carol's daughter, Amy Mullen).

***The Remains of the Hour:*** it turned out that all the callers had chosen to attend today in order to devote the time to themselves, as opposed to focusing exclusively on client work. As one said, "I cancelled all my other appointments because of my overwhelming To-Do List, but I thought I might miss something if I didn't call in." (My kind of guy.) Another said "I wanted to make sure I'm taking care of me." Yet another noted that she has been feeling unfocused lately, needed to re-focus on business, and thought that perhaps being at OM might help in that way.

This led to a conversation about "self-nutrition:" how we get the mental, emotional, physical and other kinds of nourishment we need. One participant noted he had recently decided to "reverse the proportion in my work that's nutrition versus the part that's not." He cited exercise, spiritual reading, meditation, eating "a little better," and focusing on solutions rather than problems as

being his nutritious practices. At the other end of the scale, he is being selective about which management meetings he attends. (The backstory: his practice is part of a global company, and he's seeking to keep his practice's boutique flavor intact while satisfying the shareholder constituency's demands for many happy returns. The management meetings, he noted, have "a fair amount of fear and intimidation," which he seeks to minimize. It sounds like a healthy intention, and a balancing act. I trust he'll visit often with OM, keep us informed, and share his success recipe.

Our caller who's seeking greater focus noted that she "had made a pact with myself," in order to move forward in the face of feeling overwhelmed and stuck. Her pact has included lining up her support team of good friends and others, ramping up her exercise regimen and visits with her personal trainer, and seeing a counselor to help her deal with numerous losses in her personal life. Specifically, her lack of focus took the form of "not leaving stuff outside the office door (she is a planner) that doesn't belong in the office." I asked her if she was game for a little experiment, to which she agreed. I invited her to visualize approaching her office, beginning to cross the threshold, stopping, putting down her knapsack of "stuff" in the hallway, and then entering her office and beginning her workday. She noted that she is skilled at visualization, so she enjoyed playing with this scene, and can practice with the intent of increasing her sense of focus and control (what's often called *self-efficacy*). I supported her intention, as well as continuing to turn to her support team and other healthy choices. One of the other callers expressed empathy and support for her during this trying period of transition, saying "we haven't met, but you have a community here." Well said. (*Note: I hope that readers of these Recaps also know our community is here for you, and others you might like to invite.*)

I raised the notion of "oasis," which typically is a fertile, green place in a desert, to which weary, thirsty travelers come to replenish and re-hydrate. I asked folks to describe their oases.

- "The gym – nothing can intrude on me there."
- "Turning off my Blackberry by 9 pm. I'd go earlier, but there are limits with a global company, where it's always the workday somewhere."
- "Finding ways to be present in the moment, like during time spent playing with my children. When I can truly be present, and not allow myself to be distracted, that's an oasis for me. And it's great for my children."

*(Note: This might be a good moment for you to reflect on your own oases; writing down a list of them, feeling gratitude for each one's contribution, and resolving to make full use of them.)*

**Check-out:** By that time, we were almost at the end of our time, but not of our respective ropes. I asked people for a one- or two-word checkout, to describe how this OM hour. "Calming" and "an oasis," were offered. Then "validating and reinforcing." Clearly in violation of the one- or two-word limit, this last participant added, in a profound way. "This kind of conversation gets to the heart of what's really important ... and what really matters. And it's always about *engaging with others.*"

That works for me. How about you?