

Case Study for NOVEMBER 2003 Issue of the AI Practitioner

Findhorn Foundation Consultancy Service

“Daring not to know”

Background and Client Objectives

A couple of years ago, a colleague and I were invited to work with an international campaigning organisation, for two-days in a small chateau outside Paris. Our brief was to facilitate a process that would lead to the generation of new ideas for a campaign that had been running for several years and had become a bit stuck and staid.

Process

Midway through the afternoon of the first day, and following various games and exercises to loosen up the right brain, we had generated several flip chart pages of ideas. As facilitators, we surveyed them and ventured the opinion that these ideas were not really all that new, and were the type of thing they would have come up with after several hours of thinking anywhere and with anyone. We said we felt like tearing them all up and starting again.

A hush descended on the room. Then, one woman, younger and probably with less of her own identity invested in the organisation, stood up, walked to the flip chart and, slowly at first then more and more energetically till finally she was shouting and jumping up and down, tore up all the work of the day so far.

Then she sat down.

We sat in silence with the 12 participants. Nobody spoke. Nobody moved. We sat like that for 20 minutes. Now, a minute of silence is a long time when you are facilitating a group. 20 minutes felt like forever. There were moments when I was tempted to say something, anything, to break the silence. Even to utter, “It’s OK to be silent” would have been something of a relief to me. But, reassured by my colleague, who was sure that the silence was a good and necessary part of the process, we both sat still and ... silent. Some people had their eyes shut, some didn’t. Amazingly, nobody said, “This is stupid.”, or anything like that.

Finally, my colleague spoke, remarking that it can be difficult to speak after the silence has endured so long.

This paved the way for one of the participants to speak - the young woman who had torn up all the work. . She spoke about the need to campaign from a place

of love not fear, a place of compassion, not anger. To campaign from a perspective which no longer held the moral high ground and portrayed the “others” as the “enemy” to be hunted down and destroyed, but instead to campaign from an appreciative stance, building on the positive hopes and dreams we all have for a better future and enhancing and mobilising that positive energy. To focus on our appreciation of the earth and all its beauty, and our passionate desire to preserve that for future generations. To accentuate the positive, and to refrain from playing on fear.

Others agreed. The door was open.

Outcomes: The following day, the participants generated 13 completely new, radically different ideas; and left the day feeling uplifted, inspired and hopeful.

Learning: Progress stemmed from daring to sit in the place of not knowing, of not having answers, of sitting with chaos and confusion and despair without trying to fix it. The process was, in many ways, like that described by Joanna Macy in her work on deep ecology, “Despair and Empowerment In The Nuclear Age”. Before we can be truly empowered in our work of creating new futures, we must first face our fears, our despair, our not knowing. Only then will the words we speak, the plans we make, and the actions we take, bear the hallmark of authenticity and thus carry with them the seeds of success. And our authentic self is loving, appreciative and hopeful.

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