



Once I was young and had so much more orientation and could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambing as this. - Jack Kerouac

Some people have a way with words, and others not have way. - Steve Martin

The Earth, the Sun, and the Exact Location of the Professional Soul

Organizations that attempt to substitute increased communication for increased collaboration will learn the hard way that there is a tremendous difference. Flooding someone with more information doesn't necessarily make him a better thinker. Creating a shared understanding is simply a different task than exchanging information. It's the difference between being deeply involved in a conversation and lecturing to a group. The words are different, the tone is different, the attitude is different, and the tools are different. - Michael Schrage, No More Teams!

First Thoughts ...

I was participating in a workshop a while back when the trainer made us do the dreaded 'group exercise'. I hate this kind of thing, not just because I have to wake up (at my age, naps are important), but because I know I'll be expected to say something - which will vastly increase the likelihood that people will figure out that I haven't really got a clue. Like everyone else (except, of course, Greg), I handled the pressure by avoiding eye contact and assuming the Joey Tribiani "smell the fart" pose. It was an inspiring sight: eight of us huddled uncomfortably in a silent circle, each staring off into space with pursed lips and a furrowed brow. The only thing missing was a six-foot deep hole with the remains of the dearly departed.

Still, this particular experience was worthwhile because it turned out to be more than just another ruined siesta and one more personal humiliation. Something happened: not something miraculous or earth-shaking, but something I noticed anyway ... something that I think is a pretty good metaphor for how professionalism works.

For quite awhile now, I've been yakking about how we should think about Dawn Patrol CYS not simply as a 'company' or a 'corporation' but as a **professional community**¹ - i.e., as a group of professionals working together. I believe this difference in perspectives is significant. In fact, I see it as kind of a Copernican Revolution¹ in thinking about work. When we believe that what we are doing here is "working at a job for a company" (let's call this the 'earth'-centered view), then the purpose of our personal education, skill, & expertise is to serve the goals, needs, & interests of that company. In contrast, when we believe that what we are doing is "working together as professionals" (the 'sun'-centered view), then the company becomes the means by which we realize our ambitions & aspirations as professionals - in other words, the company is just a pretext for practicing & improving our education, skill, & expertise. Its all a question of what ought to be the center of our work universe: the 'earth' of the company or the 'sun' of professionalism?²

[Be careful, now! From a therapeutic angle, the little trick I pulled in the preceding paragraph is called 'reframing'³ - and we know reframing is just a ploy to get a client to change his mind (i.e., to see things differently, so he will do things differently). If you buy it, your work world will turn upside down: you will become disoriented, maybe even a little giddy, as your occupational perceptions realign; your imagination will temporarily be set free; and you will perceive a universe of new possibilities. To those who choose to stay grounded on familiar 'earth', you will look like you are in the grip of feverish hallucinations - speaking in strange tongues, filled with strange energies and strange visions ... as if under the spell of some mischievous wizard.]

As I sat through the group exercise, I noticed a transformation taking place - one that I believe sheds a lot of light on what I mean when I talk about this agency being a professional community. I see this transformation happening in three stages: In Stage 1 (the wishing-we-were-somewhere-else stage), we were still individuals without much connection to each other beyond being clumped together and given the same exercise to do. Mostly, we were focused on our own confusion and anxieties and on the paper in front of us. There were a lot of awkward silences, with a few questions about what we were supposed to do and (importantly) a few jokes to ease the tension. In Stage 2 (the oh-oh-it's-getting-late-so-we'd-better-do-something stage), the more task-oriented amongst us began to offer tentative answers to the exercise. Mostly, I think we were worried that we would look stupid compared to the other group. Suggestions started to come slowly as people politely took turns talking, but there was still a lot of silence and individual concentration. However, in Stage 3 (the shut-up-and-listen-to-what-I-have-to-say-no-you-shut-up-etc.-etc. stage), the dam that had been holding back our creativity burst

generated stereograms that were popular about ten years ago. At first, they look like a confusing jumble of colored dots - but if you shift or 'relax' your focus, a picture suddenly pops out. All I can ask is that you think about the difference I am advocating. If you think long enough, I am sure that what I am getting at will 'pop out'.

¹ In case you have forgotten, Copernicus was the 16th Century astronomer who proposed that the sun is the center of the universe, not the earth.

² I know, we still have to live on 'earth', so what's the big difference? Well, almost everything. But if that isn't obvious, then you haven't seen the real meaning of this Copernican Revolution. It's kind of like those computer-

³ Actually, it's a really bad example of reframing - so please don't try to imitate it. I'll do a follow-up article on how to reframe properly in a therapeutic context.

and the conversation picked up pace & volume. People threw out ideas as they occurred to them – sometimes adding their own twist to other people’s insights; sometimes going in new directions; sometimes challenging old perspectives. And (importantly) the jokes continued right alongside the serious analysis and reflection. There was no longer any silence: people had to interrupt each other to be heard, and often multiple conversations were going on at once. Out of this ruckus, our solution to the exercise somehow emerged fully shaped and polished – and more *complete*, more *powerful*, & more *profound* than could have been accomplished by any one of us working alone.

The contrast between the **quality** of our thinking & performance (i.e., the quality of our *professional competence*) at Stage 1 and Stage 3 was striking. We went from confusion, ineptness, & incompleteness to the total opposite: an analysis that was clear, comprehensive, and clinically sophisticated. As Michael Schrage contends (see the quote above), a *shared* understanding is better than an *individual* understanding; and through the process of creating it, each of us became a better thinker. In addition to that, we also experienced more positive emotions (for that moment, work felt like a lively & exciting engagement rather than a self-conscious & wary isolation) and the result was that we constructed a more beneficial level of service for our client!

This transformation in competence and quality was made possible, of course, because we immersed ourselves in a broader range of perspectives, capabilities, and creative resources than we would have access to if we just worked alone. And the means by which we gained access to this broader range of resources was through a focused and sustained **dialogue** (or **conversation**) with each other. In short, we took advantage of that unique behavioural characteristic that defines the human species: *talking*.

As I said earlier, I think the three-stage process revealed in this group exercise is a good metaphor for the larger process of *professionalism* itself. If we generalize the workshop experience, then we can say that there are three stages to professionalism:

Stage 1 [Isolation] – in which professionals work and learn with minimal connection or interaction with other professionals.

Stage 2 [Task-Oriented Activity] – in which professionals focus on limited projects for limited purposes; interaction with other professionals happens sequentially and sporadically – ending as soon as tasks are accomplished.

Stage 3 [Conversation]⁴ – in which professionals find themselves working and interacting in a living community, i.e., an environment of *sustained* professional dialogue, critical reflection, challenge, & creative stimulation - an environment that requires & promotes continual learning and improvement.

Some questions come immediately to mind: Where *do* we see ourselves (as an agency) on this scale of professionalism? Where *ought* we to be? Where would we *like* to be?

In my opinion – and I emphasize that this is just *my* opinion (so please feel free to set me straight) – we are only at Stage 2, but we ought to be at Stage 3 (because that is an obligation inherent in our training and our professional ethics). I also think the vast majority of us *want* to be at Stage 3 (because that’s where work is most satisfying, meaningful, and fun).

⁴ No doubt, a better word for this Stage would be ‘collaboration’ – as defined by Michael Schrage in his book *No More Teams! Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration* [Toronto: Doubleday, 1989].

So, if Stage 3 is both an ethical obligation and a natural desire, what’s stopping us from getting there? I think there are two primary reasons: one ‘practical’; the other ‘conceptual’.

The ‘practical’ reason we have difficulty achieving Stage 3 professionalism is that we don’t have the kind of organizational ‘nervous system’ that can tie us all together to sustain an ongoing professional dialogue: we are spread over several locations (i.e., we work in too many different places); and we are spread over disparate times (i.e., we work crazy shift schedules that separate us from each other). It’s pretty hard to talk *together* when there is no constant place and no good time to actually *be together*.

More important than the practical block, however, is the ‘conceptual’ one. Actually, I pointed out what I think this block is earlier when I referred above to the Copernican Revolution in thinking about work – i.e., to the idea that we should see working with each other *not* as “working at a *job* for a company” but as “working together *as professionals*”. If we stay stuck in the first perspective, then of course we will understand work only as an endless series of limited tasks, temporarily snatching our attention, and only partially claiming our skills & efforts – *all in the service of advancing only the company’s interests and goals*. We will have no conception or expectation of anything beyond the ‘job’ at hand. However, if we adopt the second perspective, we can envision greater possibilities: we can imagine creating a community *based on what is important to us* (not just important to the corporation) – i.e., a community built on our **personal past investments** (including the money we spent educating ourselves as professionals & the time we have put into gaining clinical, real-world experience) and our **future ambitions** (in other words, the *vocational accomplishments* we hope to achieve, the *social good* we hope to realize on behalf of those we serve, and the *meaning* we hope our career as a whole will have when we look back on it). Our challenge is to get to this second perspective.

So, what can we do about these blocks?

I am honestly not sure what to do about the conceptual one – other than continue to rant from my soapbox, every chance I get, about the joys & benefits of working in a *professional community* rather than simply working at a *job*. Thankfully, my experience is that most of us here are already converted in our hearts (and were converted long before I came on the scene). There are more than enough of us to call our desire into being **if we so wish** - to move from a dreamy frustration about our untapped capabilities to actual citizenship in our own professional community. In a very real sense, this conversion is inevitable anyway (whether I do anything to promote it or not). It will happen because our entire society is caught up in a dramatic change in work values. For a variety of reasons,⁵ we (as a society) have come to think differently about our relation to work: we now expect that it should be a source not just of financial income but of professional growth, social relevance, and personal satisfaction. The drive for community is all around us, as our entire work world shifts in its own vocational Copernican Revolution. So, I really don’t have to chip away at this block very hard: I just have to throw open the doors and let the world come in.⁶ Of course, some of us will still

⁵ For example: changes in socialization; a new economic base that stresses information, ideas, and knowledge rather than tasks & products; a growing backlash against the excesses of consumerism; and technological innovations that continue to blur the traditional distinctions between work/family, work/community, and work/fun.

⁶ Yes, Gerry, I know that sentence is an egregiously mixed metaphor. But I refer you to the name of this journal. There is indeed a madness in my method.

not be convinced. For their own reasons, some will be more comfortable in the bosom of Mother 'Earth' – the alternative, well that would be a little too wild, a little too likely to "blister in the sun".

As for the practical block, there are several things we **can** do to overcome it. Obviously, we can't start working the same shift schedules in the same place. Fortunately, however, *dialogue*⁷ (i.e., "shared understanding") doesn't rely on shared time & space as much as we think. Technological & social changes have always given new possibilities and new structures for organizing and connecting people: within the last hundred years, the mass impact of the automobile and the telephone tore apart the centuries-old geographical bonds of 'community' and reconstituted them along different lines – i.e., community stopped being "where you were born" (place) and became "who you stayed in contact with" (interest). The electronic revolution of the past twenty-five years has only accelerated this trend, with the combination of computer & internet creating virtual communities of people across the globe – unseen, unheard, unfelt to each other, sharing no real time/space, and bound only by common interest.⁸

In short, we have the technology and the means, if not the will, to create and sustain our own professional community. Indeed, that realization is the impetus behind this in-house journal. Along with a revamping of our website (currently under way) & any other methods you can suggest, we hope it can be a practical instrument for better talking with each other.

So, you are hereby officially invited to join the *conversation* by submitting any articles you believe will help us develop & maintain a shared professional understanding. In general, our hope is that such contributions will fall into one or other or both of the following categories:

1. **The Mystery⁹ of our profession:** articles summarizing important professional knowledge & research, relevant professional trends; etc., etc.

⁷ Or *conversation* or even *community*.

⁸ I don't mean to suggest that these 'communities of interest' are just as good as the old 'communities of place'. Far from it: as much is lost in the transformation as is maintained. However, for the purpose of sustaining a very limited (but productive) kind of conversation, they are more than adequate. In fact, they have existed along side the more traditional communities for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. We need only think about the 'community of learned minds' (i.e., scientists) that emerged during the Renaissance, or the 'community of souls in Christ' (i.e., the Church) that bound together medieval Europe (and for which Latin alone was the enabling technology). [For a critical examination of what human qualities are lost in these 'communities of interest', see John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society* (1998).]

⁹ In the traditional guild/trade apprenticeship system, the term 'mystery' applied to the guild's specialized knowledge (i.e., its *trade secrets*). Guild (or what we would call 'professional') knowledge differed significantly from 'common sense' in that it was mostly beyond the learning of the general public & notably counterintuitive (hence *mysterious* to outsiders). Similarly, its specialized skills & practices (i.e., *tradecraft*) were referred to as its 'arts' because the level of quality reflected aesthetic excellence in complexity, balance, coordination, and detail. While the modern professions (such as Child & Youth counselling) are much more transparent, I believe the older terms still reflect important aspects we would do well to honour. [Of course, these categories often overlap: there is an essential connection between what one 'knows' and what one 'does' that often makes it impossible to distinguish between them. The point is to create conversation, though, not to chop our talk up into categories – no

2. **The Art of our profession:** articles sharing information on our individual areas of expertise, workshop/conference/course material, therapeutic techniques; personal experiences applying skills or working in this field; etc., etc.

We want to be as flexible, relevant, and entertaining as possible. We want the conversation to be worth your while - to create its own heat & momentum, so to speak. Accordingly, your contributions need not be stifled – except by the necessity for respecting professional decorum, personal integrity, copyright laws, and space.¹⁰ They may range from serious to humorous, personal to philosophical, practical to theoretical, technical to political, praise to criticism - *whatever!* The important thing is that you give voice to yourself *both as a professional and as a unique person.*¹¹

Second Thoughts ...

From the 'earth'-centered view defamed above, there is clearly an 'either/or' relation between **company goals** and **personal satisfaction**: achieving the first means sacrificing the latter (and vice versa). In fact, however, what usually happens when we are faced with this forced choice is that we choose the latter (if we know what's good for us). As a consequence, what is truly meaningful in our lives gets chased completely out of 'work' and invested in 'home' or 'friends' or some other place (religion? drugs? fishnet stockings?). This third (or fourth or fifth) place status leaves work hollowed out, lifeless, and devoid of inspiration – like Euripides' description of Troy after the Trojan War, work becomes a landscape "sacked, stripped, and smoldering", populated by vengeful bureaucratic wraiths, occupational poltergeists, and petit-political gargoyles. Who would want to spend any time in its ruins? Work without community is fundamentally work divorced from our selves – work as zombies:

*This, perhaps explains why so many people hate to go to work ... because the possibility of living a life of authenticity is virtually nonexistent. Imagine the energy it requires to survive, to endure, eight-plus hours a day not being yourself. Indeed, many of us do not have to imagine it because we live it! In these conditions, there is little hope of getting to the core of ourselves to discover and create who we are and how we are connected with others. Under such circumstances, trust of, and commitment to, others is denied a foundation, for we remain forever fearful that the dimensions of our self that we have repressed and keep hidden from view will collide with the hidden dimensions of others whom we control or who control us.*¹²

Still, most of us have little choice: we can't survive without the income that work provides. So we enslave ourselves in this graveyard of toil eight hours a day, five days a week, week after week, year after year

Adopting a 'sun'-centered perspective, however, does **not** mean that we also have to adopt this 'either/or' stance. It does **not** mean that

matter how convenient or conceptually appealing they may be. Talk, dammit, talk! Ve haf vays ...]

¹⁰ Long articles may be published in sequential parts..

¹¹ Some people are more comfortable expressing themselves orally rather than through writing. Should anyone want help converting their ideas to a written form, I will gladly offer my assistance – e.g., editing rough drafts, suggesting approaches, etc. Please do not let 'writing' get in the way of joining the conversation. I'll work with you until you are happy with what you want to say.

¹² L. Tift & D. Sullivan, "A Needs-Based. Social harms Definition of Crime" in Henry & Lanier (eds.), *What Is Crime?* [2001].

we should simply reverse the order of merit so company goals are sanctified above our personal interests: it would be foolish to think that work should outweigh family or personal commitment.¹³ Instead, spending those necessary & unavoidable work hours as part of a living, engaged professional community – rather than slogging away at a job – is just a way of living a better life here & now when 'here & now' happens to be 'work'. If we

have to be in Troy, we may as well plant a few trees, build a few dreams, share a few laughs – *anything* to make the hours more agreeable (and thereby more productive). Let me be trite: this doesn't have to be a win/lose choice between company and individual interests: it can be a win/win proposition – in fact, *if we include benefits for clients & community stakeholders*, it is a win/win/win/win scenario.

Also, in focusing on the 'group' aspects of professionalism, I'm not saying that group process is better than individual process *per se*: only that an individual that participates in an ongoing professional community conversation stands on a firmer, more creative foundation than one that doesn't. Inevitably, the former will be more competent, more confident, and more personally fulfilled than he/she would otherwise be.¹⁴ The true beauty of this kind of conversation is that it doesn't work just for the moment: once established, it carries its force & effect into future actions (both group *and* individual) – and, more importantly, it carries itself into the *thought processes* of the individual participants. In that mysterious way that characterizes only humans, we carry the conversation around with us wherever we go: in other words, we *internalize* it. This is what Sir Isaac Newton meant when he said: "If I have seen farther it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants". If we want to see farther, we simply need to stand on each other's shoulders.

Final (?) Thoughts ...

Let me resort to another therapeutic trick as I try to bring this musing to an end: i.e., *predicting (or prescribing) a relapse*.¹⁵ There is more than a fifty-fifty chance that *this* effort at creating a professional 'conversation' will fail - which is not to say that we will fail to create a professional conversation altogether: I am only predicting that such a conversation, if it happens, will happen in some way other than this journal. At best, the journal might remain a flood of information; more likely, it will quickly peter out and become

¹³ One can think of an endless number of books, movies, and cautionary tales that warn us not to put work before family – lest we be plagued by workaholism, philandering spouses, and quarrelsome children.

¹⁴ We all know this anyway. It is impossible for us as social animals not to be part of *some* communal conversation. So the choice for us is not between 'being part of a conversation' and 'not being part of a conversation'. Rather, it's between "being part of a **professional** conversation based on our investment in education, experience, and desire to make a positive difference in the world" and "being part of a directionless, unconscious, haphazard, discontented babble".

¹⁵ In working with certain types of problem behaviour, it's often a good strategy to predict failure (i.e., a return of the problem behaviour). In this way, the client is not depressed or overwhelmed when he makes a mistake – he is less likely to interpret the failure as a sign that he's really not making any changes, so all his effort in the program has been a waste. Progress is never straight-forward: it's "two steps forward, one step backward". It's important to help the client build this expectation into his perception of self.

nothing more than a dusty memory and another butt for jokes about my ivory tower abstraction – instead of being an opportunity for all of us to get our expertise & experience down on paper to share with each other. I'll make a lot of noise and maybe a few others will brave

the stage momentarily ... but in the end it'll become falling echoes, not rising chatter. Maybe, at that point, I'll change its name to *Preaching incoherently* –or, even better, *Pontificating Incoherently*.

In large part, I predict such failure because – for some obscure reason – the child & youth counselling profession in general is not very fertile ground for the written word. Unlike our sister professions (social work, psychology, & psychiatry), we seem to live in fear of immersing ourselves in books & journals & similar large piles of paper; we have *bibliophobia*, *papyrophobia*, or maybe even *cathisophobia*.¹⁶ We have a kind of macho culture that assumes that anything other than face-to-face contact is sissy or not worth the bother.¹⁷ It's like we take Shaw's quip that "he who can, does; he who cannot, teaches" way too seriously – so we end up never *teaching* (by which I mean reading & writing) in case someone gets the idea that *teaching* means we're not able to *do*. Obviously, I think we need to change this perception of our profession. There is no necessary reason why we can't do both – and there's a lot of good reasons why we *should* do both.¹⁸

So, by now it should be fairly obvious why this journal has 'talking' in its title. But what's this nonsense about 'incoherently'? Surely we would expect just the opposite from a 'professional' forum. Why isn't this *Talking Coherently*? Hmmmm ... maybe some things are better left unexplained, especially if the explanation would take up twenty more pages (not that I would have trouble with that). Besides, I've left a few clues and you can begin to figure it out yourself – and I will leave more in future articles. Still, if you're just dying of curiosity, you might want to talk with me.

- Terry Henry

¹⁶ In order: fear of books, paper, & sitting.

¹⁷ I think a good analogy is the relationship between 'test pilots' and 'flight schools' – child & youth workers see themselves as the test pilots of the human services sector: fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants, rough & tumble, action-oriented, no-nonsense cowboys who think that all that book-larnin' back in flight school is mostly too far removed from reality to be anything but a dangerous joke. In response to all that intricate, conceptual, & cerebral research, we like to do our best Alfred E. Neuman impression: "What! Me Read?"

¹⁸ Like being taken *seriously* as a *serious* and *effective* profession! If we want the respect, status, and remuneration of our sister professions, we are going to have to start acting like them. I've been confronted repeatedly with the same circular brick wall whenever I've crusaded to get my child & youth counsellor colleagues to spend more time reading & writing research reports, textbooks, journals, etc.: "I don't have the time – nobody's paying me to do all that work." *Would you accept that from your doctor or lawyer? Would you even go to a psychiatrist that hadn't kept up-to-date on her field? That's different: psychiatrists and lawyers get paid a whole lot more than me. If I got that much money, I'd read all that boring crap too!* *But think about it! Which came first: the high pay or the reading? Does anyone seriously think that these other professions read & write so much because they get more money? Isn't it far more likely that they get more money because they do more reading and writing?!* If we want to climb that mountain of professional respect, we gotta do it the way everyone else has.