

To Be of Use

The people I love the best
jump into the work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who stand in the line and haul in their places,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hop vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry.

Marge Piercy

A note from Connie: My mother once told me that my work ethic is my inheritance. It is a thought that always encourages me as I think of my parents, grandparents and ancestors working steadily within their families and communities. I appreciate work as an important human endeavor.

Some people may worry that Trauma Stewardship contains information that will undermine work—if people demand time off or more institutional support or what have you. But I strongly disagree. When our work exposes us to trauma, it takes a kind of toll that is distinct from other work. Unattended, it erodes our ability to show up and deliver. Developing personal and institutional practices that address trauma exposure is a way of honoring and sustaining a strong work ethic.

Trauma Exposure Response

a quick review

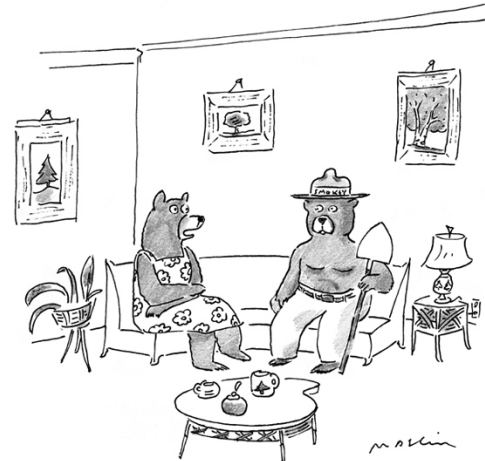
From Trauma Stewardship

Three Levels of Trauma Exposure

- 1) Personal Dynamics
- 2) Organizational Tendencies
- 3) Societal Forces

Trauma Exposure Response

- Feeling Helpless and Hopeless
- A Sense That One Can Never Do Enough
- Hypervigilance
- Diminished Creativity
- Inability to Embrace Complexity
- Minimizing
- Chronic Exhaustion/Physical Ailments
- Inability to Listen/Deliberate Avoidance
- Dissociative Moments
- Sense of Persecution
- Guilt
- Fear
- Anger and Cynicism
- Inability to Empathize/Numbing
- Addictions
- Grandiosity: An Inflated Sense of Importance Related to One's Work



"Only I can prevent forest fires? Don't you think you should share some of the responsibility?"

Hallmarks of "Stress resistant persons"

Based on the research of Bessel A van der Kolk

- A Sense of Personal Control—(self-determination and agency)*
- Pursuit of Personally Meaningful Tasks
- Healthy Lifestyle Choices
- Social Support

Organizational Change Notes

Be the change you want to see in the world—Gandhi

Newtonian Physics: “The Universe is a Clockwork.”

Life is a machine that can be identified, described, categorized, controlled.

As a machine, it is fragile and will eventually break down and fall apart.

The Belief: “Life’s” natural state is to devolve into **anarchy**.

The Response: Establish, maintain & expand **control**.

Quantum Physics: At its sub-atomic level, the Universe is all relationships.

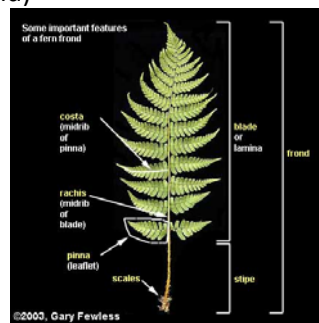
Systems are self-referencing, adaptive, fractal.

Self-referencing: Living systems continuously renew themselves. This constant renewal also means that living systems are always in a state of change. They are never static, but they are often stable. They regulate this process in a way that maintains the integrity of their structure. They are always changing but always themselves.

Within that “globally stable state” a living system is always changing and thrives on diversity and autonomy within its members. (ex: Like biodiversity of a field)

Adaptive: A living system continuously takes in and integrates new information into itself and changes based on this information.

Fractal: Shapes that can be split into parts, each of which is a reduced-size copy of the “whole”, a property called [self-similarity](#).



Organizations, like living systems, are process structures.

“Living Systems are not fragmented machines made up of many constituent parts that we have to put and hold together, but a universe rich in processes that support growth and coherence, individuality and community.” Margaret Wheatly

From the Newtonian view—we approach organizations as sets of functions, roles, responsibilities, disciplines and categorized areas of work and influence.

From a Process Structure or Systems view—we approach organizations as a flow of relationships, combining and recombining to adapt to current environments and situations, and to develop enough complexity to process new information.

Instead of “*fixing*” our organizations (fixing as in *making permanent*, or fixing as in *repairing*) what if we fostered “congruence”?

con·gru·ence (kɒŋ'grō-əns) n.

Agreement, harmony, consistency, or correspondence.

Congruence (agreement, harmony, consistency, correspondence) between:

- How we do our work and the goals we have for what we’re doing.
- How we treat our colleagues, supervisors, staff and how we assert we should treat our clients.
- **How we seek change and the change we want to experience.**

Hineni. “Here I am.”

Praxis.

Choice.

Agency.

Engagement.

Resource.

Direction.

Action.

Relationships.

How to be a lifelong learner in 5 easy steps:

- Try Something
- Observe what Happens
- Reflect on what Happened
- Incorporate what you Learned
- Try the Next Thing

This process of intentional learning is called “Praxis”. **Practice Praxis!**

We have choices.

All of us every day. In how we relate to and work for our organizations, and how our organizations relate to and work for our constituents.

Agent: A person in charge of herself.

- Is the “**subject**” of her own life.
- Can act, make choices, reflect & act again.
- Knows that **what she does matters**.
- **Always has choices**.
- **Can be accountable** for her actions.

A strong sense of being in control of oneself is the most important factor for organizational change work.

A Useful Tangent

Agency, Women & the Domestic Violence Field

Four Principles

Each of these principles ask us to examine ourselves as “change agents”. That is: as people in charge of ourselves!

Engagement before Opposition

- **Opposition:** requires you to fortify and crystallize where you disagree.
- The problem with “legitimate power” coming only through critique, of tearing down ideas. We need to build up our skills in collaboration, collective resolution and engagement.
- Alinsky style opposition, based on a sum zero idea of power, that there is only a finite amount of power and if you want more you have to take it from someone else. This is achieved through tactics like boycotts, protests, sit-ins, demonstrations to shame and create a high enough cost that the target will concede. The Alinsky model included setting a goal for change or building collective power, identifying a target who had power in relationship to that goal, going to that target to demand change, doing an action if the demands were not met to create enough pressure to force the change.
- Now, we have inherited a culture of opposition where even the goals are dropped out and we are left with pure opposition for the sake of self-righteousness, not even the goal of building collective power, but simply being on the record as having said, No.
- Opposition is used to excuse gossip and trash talking and estrangement.
- Opposition as a first response has a “chilling effect” on community organizing. If people become convinced that mistakes will be met with automatic protest, they may take fewer risks to make change.
- **“Lashon Hara (talking trash)** kills three: the one who speaks it, the one who listens and the one talked about. (Talmud)” In the Jewish Tradition, speech is considered to be *lashon hara* if it says something negative about a person or party, is not previously known to the public, is not seriously intended to correct or improve a negative situation, and most importantly, is true.
- **Oppositional tactics can be very effective when used thoughtfully within the context of specific and clear community goals.** (The WTO protests in Seattle where the joint and coordinated efforts between the African Delegates to the WTO and the protesters on the street resulted in the round failing.)
- Oppositional tactics should rarely be our default position and they should NEVER be used first in community settings. We should always engage each other first!
- **To create social change, ethical opposition to the status quo is a vital tool!** but productive opposition always follows a real attempt at engagement.
- **Engagement** calls us to continue to build understanding, to continue to reach for one another through difference and disagreement.
- If someone says, “That organization is homophobic.” We should say, “What did they say when you talked to them about it?” “Who has reached out to talk with them? To challenge/support change?” Engagement allows us to treat people like we want to be treated!
- **The Default position toward ANY organization or institution within which you can talk to a live person should be one of engagement.**
- **You can: Approach disagreement with genuine curiosity. Know what we want to build, not just what we want to end. Be assertive AND humble. Be thankful for what’s been done before us.**
- **What you can do today: Stop trash talking and gossiping! Call up someone and ask them what they meant. Do not end organizational relationships until you have tried engagement!**

Resource before increase

- Keva & kavana—fixed and spontaneous prayer. Both are mitzvah, both required to fully experience worship, they require boundaries—Keva—the fixed task—must be limited to leave space for inspiration. No matter how valuable it is to add fixed times to worship, it must be limited in order to allow for spontaneous worship.
- Before agreeing to be responsible for an increase in work be clear about what resources are available to support that increase.
- 85-90% deployment on a regular basis allows space for busy times, new ideas & inspiration.
- Could be additional staff support, a decrease in another area of our work, a collaboration with another organization.
- Demonstrate solidarity for others. Even if you, personally, have the resources or stamina to sustain over-working/over-committing for a time, don't do it out of solidarity to folks less resourced than you. If folks routinely over-work, it makes it harder for everyone to request and expect a reasonable level of deployment.
- **Transforming “I can never do enough”.** This is an issue that masks a lot of the consequences of systematic oppression and inequality.
- **Looking honestly at our motives: turf, competition & scarcity.**
- Be Creative! We have found that bartering can be a strong way to find unexpected “resources” to support a new task. For example, an organization wanted our organization to train their board of directors but they had not designated any money to help cover the cost of developing and providing the training. We were able to barter volunteers for our annual fundraising event for the training. Their board members showed up to help out at our event and we developed and provided the training they needed.
- **What you can do today: Stop over-committing! Ask for what you need to accomplish what you agree to do.**

Intention before action

- Do not act before you have had the time to consider a thoughtful course of action, to think through possible unintended consequences and to bring needed resources to bear.
- When you are feeling urgent, that is a good time to check in to make sure you are being intentional before you act.
- Ask for the time you need to make the decision! With the speed of communication faster than ever, we can find ourselves being asked to make big decisions with little or no lead time. You may find that you get little resistance to asking for more time.
- By stating your intentions explicitly, you can evaluate if this course of the action is the best way to achieve that goal. You may be able to identify something else that more closely aligns with your intention.
- You want your actions to be consistent with your vision and goals as well as short term needs.
- **What you can do today: When deciding on a course of action, start stating your intention. “I am agreeing to serve on this committee because I think the relationships I can build with other committee members will strengthen my program.”**

Direction before reaction.

- When a reaction to an outside event moves you in the same direction as your proactive goals, proceed! Otherwise, it might be wise to skip the reaction and continue on your own course.
- Often we are called upon to react to external information and situations. For example, a high profile case in the news often warrants an organizational response.
- Organizations that support people exposed to trauma are susceptible to spending more time reacting to external events than moving forward on their own agendas.
- Reacting to timely issues is important but it must come after a clear direction is set by an organization outlining what it wants to achieve.
- The organization's proactive agenda should be prioritized over reaction. It can be harder to set one's own direction than to react to other people's actions, but it is critical.
- **What you can do today: Whenever you undertake a new task, ask yourself: Is this part of my agenda (my organization's agenda) or is this reacting to someone else's goals or external agendas? Evaluate if you have the balance you want between Direction and Reaction.**

Key Concepts that Have Emerged in Our Discussions about Organizational Response to Trauma Exposure

--**Valuing Leadership** When we value leadership, we increase our own skills at leadership & make opportunities for others to lead.

- Think of a leader in your community.
- Call them up.
- Thank them.
- Ask how you can support their leadership. (Authentic support: both “right ons!” & “whoas!”)
- Support their leadership.

--**Know why you are doing what you are doing, if you don't know why you are doing what you are doing, stop until you figure it out!**

--**Authorizing environment** (Look for congruence between responsibility and authority.)

The authority to do what one is responsible to do, or to do what one is doing.

- Responsibilities or tasks may be well identified in job descriptions, but authority to achieve responsibilities are often less clear
- In the workplace, stress is often defined as what happens when “responsibility exceeds authority”. The best environment is one in where program staff are authorized to do what they are responsible to do. That is to say that program staff have the means and the authority to make decisions to carry out the expectations of their job.

--**Organizational Culture**

In organizational culture, we are looking for congruence between artifacts, espoused values, and our underlying assumptions.

- **Artifacts**
Things you can see, handle, experience that communicate information about your organizational culture. The kinds of services offered, arrangement of desks, how materials look, wording of mission statement, etc.
- **Espoused values**
What we say that we stand for and want to achieve, the stories of how we came to do what we do.
Mission statements, guiding values, eligibility requirements
- **Underlying Assumptions**
The beliefs and ideas that underpin our espoused values, some of these may be well understood and explained, others may be more intuitive and less articulated.
We usually hold at least some conflicting underlying assumptions that contradict one another. Becoming more aware of our Underlying Assumptions can allow us to identify possible conflicts and seek to engage the tension that they represent.

--**Work load** (congruence between values for social change, equity, respect for workers & work load)

- In a daily way, we should be deployed at less than 100% routinely
- How many people can you/your organization serve responsibly?
- How can you negotiate that as a worker? How can you negotiate that as a leader (ex: Cost of Living Increase or contract deliverable decrease for every contract.)

--Physical space

How offices, work spaces and direct service spaces are organized, furnished, maintained.

- A powerful “artifact” of organizational culture that demonstrates commitment and respect for various parts of the work. (Ex: Up-to-date administrative digs and run-down direct service spaces do not communicate robust respect for direct services.)
- Access to co-workers
- Access to leadership

--Staff Development/Clinical Support

- Regular clinical support for staff exposed to trauma to debrief with professionals.
- Staff development plan, foster learning

--Creativity

--Transparency

--Thinking through organizational assumptions

Relationships to consider when looking at Trauma Stewardship on an Organizational Level

Worker → to Organization

(How one makes boundaries, negotiates, communicates expectations, shows up with one’s A game, contributes to organizational culture, etc)

Organization → Worker

(how responsibilities and expectations are set, organizational culture, appreciations, compensation etc.)

Organization → to Organization and Community

(how conflicts are raised and resolved, How connections prioritized and sustained, how resources/information shared)

With any given aspect of Trauma Stewardship, we may have more or less access to making change on any of these levels. Thinking about possibilities on each of these (and other!) levels may be of use.

Ask: What can I do as a worker?
 What can I do as an organization influencer?
 What can I do as a liaison to other organizations, communities?
 What can I do as a leader?

Conflict Resolution

In almost any conflict within an organization you have three options:

- **Let it go.**
- **Deal with it one on one.**
- **Deal with it in process (staff meeting, mediation, grievance, etc.)**

Often workers (and organizations!) do not know what the “process” is for dealing with conflicts within the organization. If you are trying to resolve a conflict and you have tried one level of the process and it has failed to bring about some resolution, it is time to research your next option. Is that a mediator? A formal grievance procedure?

What is the new input available for the problem: outside listener, new resource, different attitude?

If all parties are bringing the same input to a situation, you are likely to get the same outcome.

Praxis Exercise

Review How You are Spending Your Time.

How can you allocate your time to support a Trauma Stewardship Practice?

<p>Important/Urgent This is what creates a sense of crisis in our work. From time to time we have to react to urgent and important situations, but often important/urgent situations arise because we are spending too much time in a reactive mode. If we can shift more of our time to intentional, planful work—we can often reduce the amount of time we find ourselves spending in this area.</p>	<p>Not Important/Urgent This is where we find ourselves spending a lot of time – think email. We want to spend the least of our time here, because working urgently on non-important issues takes a greater toll on our organizations that working on non-important issues in a relaxed way!</p>
<p>Important/Not Urgent We should spend the most of our time here. This is the most proactive work area. This should include time for a Trauma Stewardship Practice, appreciation and celebration! If we ignore something here, it will move up to Important/Urgent!</p>	<p>Not Important/Not Urgent If we are spending too much time here, it may be a real indicator of a trauma exposure response and the Warning Signs of avoidance and feeling helpless and hopeless. Reallocate your time to your Trauma Stewardship Practice</p>