

Building Your Own Support

by
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REFLECTIONS ON PERSONAL SUPPORT

Leaders And Support

Real leaders don't need support, they give it. That is what one of my clients thought. He was very sensitive to the needs of others yet he could also be tough. His organization needed to make some fundamental changes, which would be difficult in the short term. He wanted management behind the changes because they would not "fly" if there wasn't full support from the management team. This organization had a tradition of annual meetings where the last year was reviewed and plans for the future were presented. Over 1000 managers attended. This was the meeting where he wanted to sell them on the changes.

A great deal of preparation went into the meeting. Top management not only consulted on the technical side of the changes but planned for the feelings they expected the changes to provoke. There were presentations and discussion groups each day. The presentations were state of the art multimedia media, highly polished, and each detail was critiqued by the communications experts. Each night the CEO was up until two or three in the morning strategizing or discussing with formal and informal leaders about the acceptance of the ideas. But it wasn't working. Statements made by presenters about the business and emotional issues were greeted with quiet cynicism by the managers. In the group sessions and over the breaks grumbling and resistance was increasing.

In the late afternoon, before the closing morning session, the CEO pulled me aside. After some discussion he told me that it wasn't working and said, "Dave what should I do?" He was fatigued, feeling down, and had used all of his excellent intellectual arguments to no avail. He had more meetings planned for that night with people on both sides of the issues.

I knew that he was very popular among the managers, but he was so tired and focused on persuading them that his own personality hadn't come through to his people. So I simply said, "Cancel the meetings tonight and get enough sleep. Tomorrow, be yourself. Share your own feelings, don't talk about feelings in the abstract." Then, since I had a prior engagement, I left and missed his closing speech.

The following Monday our office got one of those calls that any consultant can live on for weeks. The CEO was elated. He had done just what I suggested. He slept all night, and threw out his prepared speech. He talked about what the changes meant to him and shared his frustrations. The audience was captivated and

the meeting closed on a very high note. For several months later I heard from managers in his company about how different the last morning had been and how **their** CEO had persuaded them with his genuine involvement. He had been genuine all along, but his exhaustion and preoccupation with how the message was being received had left only a caricature of the person they all wanted to follow. **Sometimes what you are is more important than what you do.**

Your own personality is one of your most important tools as a leader when initiating change. In this chapter we are concerned with the maintenance of that tool. To manage in an age of constant change (and stress), the responsible leader must build his or her own support. That means creating structures which support you in realistic ways. That support is necessary to manage the pressures and meet your responsibilities to the organization and the people. That means you must work throughout to do for yourself what we have said you must do for your people: Give more support when there is more change.

It is easier to tell someone they need to support themselves than it is to tell them how to support themselves. No one can tell another person what to do for support unless they know the individual extremely well or suggest categories broad enough that they will fit for everyone. That is because people are so different, not only in their specific personalities, but in the environment where they operate. In a book, the best one can do is present generalizations and then give examples of how other people applied those principles in their specific lives. Once the support structures are defined you see how most are obvious, but have been taken for granted or forgotten, which we said is a characteristic of structure. Much of this will sound like common sense, but since it is so often overlooked by very competent leaders I will repeat the obvious. In essence the way you build your own support is to:

- Keep A Realistic Perspective,
- Build Supportive Structures At Work, In Your Family, And In Yourself;
- Obtain Knowledge,
- Include The People You Need In The Information Gathering Process, And
- Build Relationships.

Those are the generalizations, now for some examples and explanations.

KEEP A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

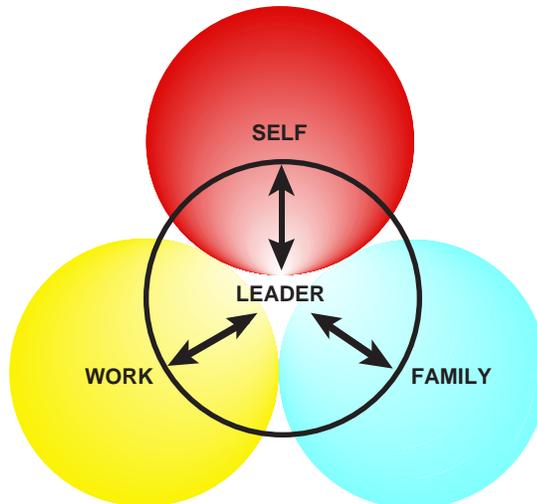
Support Or Self Indulgence

Our perspective about doing the work of creating our support is important. To slip into a self indulgent mode not only betrays the reason for doing the work (to

be more effective in our work with others), it is not good for us. One of the important coping devices is altruism—caring for others (Ref.). It protects one from illness caused by stress. Individuals who are overly concerned with themselves have more illness and problems in their lives. They can get caught up in a spiral of running into difficulties, then focusing even more on their own desires, and getting into more difficulties. So we don't do this work because we are so precious; we do it in order to make more effective contributions. Then we might truly be precious to someone else.

Altruism is relevant, because the three primary areas in which we build our support are: work, family, and self. All contribute to the leader's ability to manage change. They give support, but when ignored will often distract or frankly undermine. There is a dynamic give and take between the three areas. If the self is not giving back it will become harder and harder to get support in return. It is one of those paradoxes that does not fit into an all or none perspective. If we are to tend to ourselves we must care for others, and if we are to care for others we must tend to ourselves.

AREAS FOR SUPPORT



In this diagram “leader” is only an outline, because it is an abstraction. It is a function, a role, which is sustained by the realities of the other three. Work is whatever you put effort into so you can produce something: steel, consulting services, healing experiences, music, whatever your product is to be. “Family” is not just the traditional, legal, or genetic family, but that group that consistently works to sustain each other through the give and take of human relationships. You don't have to be married to have a family. “Self” is all of you, with your unique past and hoped for future.

If you don't realistically tend to yourself, you will be more insensitive, less realistic, and more clumsy when you try to contribute to work or family. It is difficult for many people to find the mid-point between self indulgence and irresponsible self neglect. It requires discipline and occasional reflection on the basics.

A second perspective relates to stress and discomfort. You don't want to get rid of stress, because stress is change; and change is required for growth. You also don't aim for a life without discomfort. That is dangerous. That contributes to alcoholism, drug addiction, avoidance of important work, and avoidance of new information.

Trying to avoid the discomfort of making required personal changes can cause a person to avoid making the changes, or on the other hand, trying to get it all done at once. Making personal changes for growth and development and for building one's own support takes some time. The strategy is to make small changes early in the process. Metaphorically it is like shooting a rocket at the moon from orbit. You make very small adjustments early in the process or you can miss something as large as the moon.

Another important part of your attitude is to recognize that you did the best you could. When we get new information about how we work with people, we find mistakes we made with people. If we are particularly sensitive, we feel badly and say something like "If I had only known then what I know now." The fact is that you didn't know it then. You did the best you could with the information you had. Now that you have the new information, use it to do better in the future, not to feel badly about acting without it in the past.

When I first started working in the seminars for executives at the Menninger Foundation, the lecture on Early Childhood was one of the more unpopular lectures. The information was important for understanding adults, but busy executives rarely wanted to hear a presentation on the developmental stages of children less than six. So, that lecture was given to the new person on the team—me.

I thought that understanding the growth and development of children was terribly interesting, and could be made so, even to busy executives. I put in several hundred hours of work making it relevant and interesting to the participants. I tied it to experiences with their own children. It soon became one of the highest ranked lectures. The participants not only found it valuable, they enjoyed it. But then I encountered something that troubled me. Many executives came up after the lecture and said, "I wish I had heard that when my own children were little. I made so many mistakes," and they felt badly.

Then it was more understandable why so many of them resisted the information in the first place. They sensed they would find themselves incomplete and feel badly about it. While we don't avoid information just to keep from feeling

badly we can diminish needless discomfort by putting our old actions in the proper perspective.

The fact is most of them didn't have the information when they were raising their children. They did the best they could with the information they had at the time. That is the way it is with new information. If it is useful, you wish you had it sooner. If it is about people you may judge yourself too harshly. Perhaps they should have sought the information sooner, but no matter when they got it there would have been a time when they didn't have it and could have used it.

This is not inconsistent with my caution about avoiding discomfort. Sometimes we do need to feel guilty, or ashamed, or anxious. When those feelings are handled appropriately they will contribute to our changing in a useful direction. But they must always be put in the proper perspective or they will stifle our normal willingness to move into new dimensions of life. All of us wish we could do some things over, because we know now what we didn't know then.

BUILD SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURES

At Work:

Supportive structures include good management practices, and you don't need a psychiatrist to tell you those. On the other hand, I have listened to thousands of successful executives talk about how they manage the pressures of their work. I listened not from the standpoint of what made business sense, but what made sense in terms of supporting them in their quest to accomplish their goals. (Most often they did accomplish their business goals, but there were many other factors which contributed to that.) What they did to give themselves realistic support is relevant to this discussion. What follows are suggestions from successful executives about building support structures at work. Sometimes the suggestions were stated explicitly in their own words. More often, the suggestions were implied in the way they worked.

The **structures you build to support your people will also support you.** There are several reasons for this. First, when you create a structure for managing the processes of change and loss you will diminish your own surprises and wasted efforts. The second reason involves one of your specific suggestions, you too will benefit from predictable times when those involved get together to share and analyze feelings, anticipate problems, reassess strategies, and check the progress of their personal mastery of the transition.

There is another, more subtle, reason why you gain support when you support your people. Managers' real support comes from their subordinates. One study examined the consequences of role conflict for managers. Role conflict basically means that different people in the organization (bosses, subordinates, peers) see your role (what you are to do) in conflicting ways. If you are in a management position, you are almost guaranteed to have role conflict. Role conflict causes an increase in blood pressure, pulse rate, and cholesterol (ref.).

People in role conflict want support from their boss and their spouse. If they receive support from their boss and their spouse they feel better, but the physiological problems don't change. If they receive support from their subordinates, their cholesterol, blood pressure, and pulse rate all go down. So, again, we have an example of doing what's realistic, not necessarily what makes you feel better.

Subordinates give the most support because they have the power that comes from doing the work. This is another example of the interdependence between boss and subordinates. So the examples about building supportive structures at work will include structures for your people as well as for your self. You can not do one without doing the other.

Planning Time: Set aside blocks of time to analyze the human side of your work., both your own and your peoples. Include in this your examination your relationship with your people.

A successful executive vice president in a unusually successful company talked to me one evening during a break in a seminar. He said, "You know, anybody whose work affects other people's lives (and that is anybody in management) should take at least one block of **four hours every quarter to think about personal personnel issues.** Once a quarter is a minimum; once a month is not too often." He wanted to make sure I understood he was not talking about the non-personal, technical, aspects of personnel, but the personal ones. What are the personal repercussions of people working in your organization? He then added something I felt was particularly wise: "They should plan on wasting the first hour."

Not only do you need to set a time to plan, you need to anticipate some of the problems with doing it. The first problem is feeling like you are wasting your time. When we move from working primarily on non personal problems to reflecting about interpersonal challenges, it initially feels like we are wasting our time. As a matter of fact, it would be wasting time if we were still working on a technical problem. (Just as thinking about technical problems is usually wasting time when working on personal problems.) You sit at your desk with a yellow tablet and try to get started. Your thoughts turn to a grandmother, or your brother, or a robin outside the window, or a dream you had about how people could work together better. That feels like a waste of time, but it isn't. It is an important part of the process for this kind of reflecting. Some of the time in this work your thinking does not follow Aristotelian logic. It follows more the logic of a 4-year-old or a poet.

The second problem we encounter when doing this work is dealing with the ambiguity most executives see when facing the topic of human needs. If you have little experience with such work you may feel the need for structure. Too much can narrow your perspective , but generalizations and open ended questions to ask yourself can help without being too limiting. To help structure those times, here are eight suggestions.

1. Make The Time Pleasant. That will help you get started. If a certain kind of music helps you introspect without being distracted, play it. If you have some short readings about people you haven't had the time to read, spend 10-15 minutes with those. This can help start the process.

2. Define What Human Qualities Are Required For Your Work And Your People's Work: Just as you define the technological requirements of the work you do, define what the human requirements are—both for yourself and your subordinates. Push yourself to get specific about the definition of personal requirements. The requirements may vary by position, but likely possibilities for most everyone include “good enough” reality testing, integrity, and judgement overall. Define what those mean to you and hold yourself and each of your people up against those standards. Where is the group strong or vulnerable? How about yourself and each individual? Are you taking measures to take care of and support yourselves as well as each other?

Always keep in mind worst case possibilities for stress when defining the human qualities you need. Do reality testing, integrity, and judgment break down under high-pressure circumstances? Do those people you need care for themselves? Can you afford to depend on people who are not tending to their own support? Do you have “hot house” plants who will wilt under stress and not be there when you need them the most? Under what circumstances might you as a boss wilt like a hot house plant? Think about the special pressures you face as the boss.

3. Define The Pressures You Feel In Your Work. List your own typical responses to those pressures. Then, list how you would like to respond. Be concerned if you say the ideal way to respond is exactly the same as your typical responses (as I sometimes see when working with executives that are in trouble). That can mean you are unable to see your own role in your problems or are unable to dream and see how much better things could be.

4. Analyze The Role Of Feelings In Your Work. What role do they have in your own management style? Generally feelings are data about personal needs of ourselves and others. They are important, but we don't want them to provoke us to act impulsively. When can you trust your feelings? When do you need to watch them? For example, some people don't confront others until they are angry. But when they are angry, they don't think as clearly and then the confrontation becomes a destructive adversarial process instead of an opportunity to solve problems. You don't want to be angry every time you confront. People then just think of your confrontations as a way for you to ventilate your anger and whatever intellectual content accompanies it is seen as irrelevant. There are also times when confrontation should be dispassionate or even with compassion if the person is to learn from it. Inefficient or wasted confrontation undermines support.

5. Examine Your Sources Of Support And Creativity. Try to define who that person is with whom you can bleed when the pressure is too much. Maybe the person is at work, or somewhere else. If you can't bleed with people at work, can you laugh with some people there? Are there a few people with whom you can play

for a short time, even when things are tough? It is very difficult, maybe impossible, to be innovative without being playful. I don't mean play in an absurd sense. I mean being able to play with ideas—being irreverent enough to turn sacred cows inside out. Laughter is almost always a part of the creative process.

6. Plan For Developing Managers. If the people working for you are a significant support, the better they are the more supported you will be. So it is in your best interest to develop them. When you are giving quality performance appraisals, mentoring, and doing career counseling you are supporting yourself. Make a specific plan for developing your future managers. Identify your most promising candidates. Then in most organizations, you need to anticipate what usually happens to good people—they move. If they are very good, they will have opportunities someplace else. So be prepared to lose them. In times of change there is one more thing to anticipate: Be prepared to lose them sooner than you expected!

Thus you work to develop more people than you need. Those who leave will remember you and will more likely be allies in other parts of the organization and sometimes even in the market place (for example, when they leave to work for a potential customer). Your plan should incorporate ways for them to make personal changes, not just tack on technical skills. That means, you need to define their unique strengths and weaknesses. This is why periodic career counseling sessions are important for the supervisor, not just the subordinate.

Define what is needed for them to turn their weaknesses into strengths and to develop new abilities. The old idea that managers only need to find ways for their subordinates' strengths to compensate for each other's weakness will work in a static situation. When there is constant change, the individuals come and go while the various tasks continually shift. In this situation the manager needs to become more concerned with developing than fitting people. This limits the utility of "off the shelf" programs which are intended to develop a "generic" manager. Times of constant change require different models of management development than more stable times. They will require more personal and more individual time. That has been a part of the development of many of the leaders with whom I have worked.

Some of the best development comes from informal talks about the work by the leader. It comes from **"feet up on the desk time."**

Many executives have talked about periods of increased learning with a valued mentor. They worked for months on a difficult problem. Sometimes they even spent weeks in an apartment downtown because they were working most of each night and weekends. Then they had some breathing space and were about to rush home when the mentor caught a group of them. He said, "Wait don't go. Come into my office."

Depending upon his style he may have offered them a cigar or a drink. He put his feet up on the desk and then the fun began. "Joe, what would you have done to keep us from getting into this mess in the first place?" And Joe told him. "But if you did that you would have gotten

yourself in trouble with Bill. Bill, what would you have done?” Of course Bill’s solution caused problems for somebody else. So on it went. In that way he taught them about the interconnections in an organization and stretched their view to reach beyond their own narrow area of responsibility.

Those mentors recognized a teaching and development opportunity and they took advantage of it. They also were building their own support. Former proteges supported them in their own upward climb, and when they got into trouble there were many talented colleagues who came to their rescue.

These experiences can be the most rewarding times in a person’s career, but they are also often difficult times to set aside.

7. Examine The Role Of Administrative Structures. This is a time when administrative structures are seen as inhibiting flexibility, and stifling empowerment of those doing the work . Yet dependable structures help us to manage more change. Creating organizational structures can be overdone, but that is just the trick—giving the proper amount of structure. The leader who is not decisive enough, or who doesn’t give enough directions to subordinates will distress them unnecessarily. When they are distressed, they will distress him.

Most of us think we give very clear directions and ample support to those who help with our work. The problem is that we tend to give to others the amount of structure we need. So a manager may need a consultant from outside his own sphere of influence to find how much his subordinates need. The outside consultant may be someone from human resources, but sometimes will need to be a person from outside the organization. The task is to define the human requirements of the work just as the manager defines the technical requirements of the work. Obviously, those administrative structures need to be communicated to the subordinates and then the leader needs to respect them.

8. Reflect On The Adequacy Of Communications. Understandable communication channels will give you support. When the communication channels are clear, it cuts down on the need for searching for an answer; unnecessary emotional exchanges; and surprises. Some of the communication channels will need to be formal, but the important piece is that the individuals know there are times for them to talk about their problems.

A senior manager talked too much about details, and did it in a way that his boss found distasteful. His boss found time with him to be tedious. She tried to cut the discussions short and kept their meetings to a minimum. The manager began to feel his boss wasn’t interested in his area when, in reality, the boss was concerned about his area and even believed the manager was talented in some important functions. But the manager felt the boss didn’t listen, and he had to push to get a hearing with her. Since he was concerned that he wasn’t getting his points across he intruded even more on his boss’ time to try to make

his point again. He was eating up more of her time than any other subordinate, and it was not fruitful.

We were able to stop this debilitating spiral by having the boss schedule regular meetings when she made sure there were no interruptions and she did nothing but listen. Then she began to discuss the manager's communication style. Both were happier and the boss ended up spending less time with the manager, who now felt he had been given a hearing on his problems.

Simply designating a time when people know you will listen to them seriously will diminish pseudo emergencies and actually save time in the long run. When we know there will be a time in the week to discuss a problem, most of us can wait unless the problem is truly urgent. It is when we don't know if there will ever be a time that our concerns increase the urgency and we inadvertently create a pseudo emergency. When that happens to someone who needs you to listen to them, then they commonly intrude on your work. You are not as good a listener as you otherwise would be. They don't feel that they've received the hearing they needed and so they tend to talk longer and return with problems which are only variations on the theme you partially heard before. The parties are soon mutually reinforcing the behavior which they don't want. The subordinate constantly pushes for time because he didn't feel he was adequately understood. The leader feels constantly intruded upon and doesn't give the kind of attention that would help.

Set aside ten to fifteen minutes each week to listen to members of your staff who are particularly distressed.

Another kind of communication that supports you is feedback about your own functioning. You can't count on performance appraisals to give it even if they are supposed to in ideal organizations. We can whine that we never had a good performance appraisal or we can decide to get the information we need about our own functioning. Here is a relatively common example of confusing the issues when it comes to feedback.

This group of managers was working on making the organization more responsive to constant change. I have not worked with a group that underwent more change over so many years. Because things were so fluid everyone was vulnerable at one time or another. Some of them were getting themselves into serious trouble that most of the group could see. Yet they were as resistant to discussing the issues in the group as they were to making the changes in the work. When I raised the point of what well functioning teams did with information about members' vulnerabilities we commonly got into discussions on how to give feedback. Those discussions can go on and on with the ever present problem of how do you know if someone wants feedback. If they don't want it should you give it? That is an effective resistance in a group to giving needed personal information. Each individual is focusing on the wrong thing.

Who gets the most out of feedback on problems? The person getting it! Yet all the attention is on giving it! Instead of getting into philosophical discussions on giving feedback, each of the group members should simply say, "I can't speak for anyone else, but I want to make it perfectly clear to all of you that I want feedback. Don't worry about how you give it to me, just give it. If I don't make you feel good for giving it, then tell me that. Now does everyone understand, I want you to give me feedback about problems I am causing myself!" The people who don't speak up can then live with the consequences of others pondering how to tell somebody they are causing their own problems.

You can't make somebody else want feedback, but you can make sure you do everything you can to get it. It is hard to give feedback, so make it easy for people to give it to you. Let them know you want it. Stifle your normal urge to get defensive when you receive it. Let the person know you appreciate it. And then let them know what you did about it, so they will want to give you some more.

These examples are basically about planning and being proactive in the ambiguous area of people and their needs. If you support others, then you support yourself in the long run. You do have your own needs. If they are too frustrated your own anger can deskill you. We all can lose some of our competence when our feelings are too strong as a result of being ignored too long. So you plan ahead in order to have support during the tough times. Even you need someone to listen and feedback information you already knew but forgot because you were so pressured by the changing work.

Build Family Structures

Broken Structures: Perhaps the more important area to think about building supportive structures is in the family. There is less written about that so managers may overlook the need. In the second half of the 20th century, we've lost many of our family structures without knowing it. We do have a unique challenge with our families. As I have been able to understand history, most of the time civilized people had more rituals, tradition or structure (which is support) than they could use. For short times, during war or revolution, the traditions broke down for awhile; but they were soon rebuilt. Family members didn't even need to think about building structures because the outside world forced so many constraints on them. Most of our fathers and mothers taught us how to get rid of structures, not how to build traditions.

As I've listened to executives talk about their lives, many have shared a common pattern. The executive says, "I've made more money than my father ever dreamed of making. We have more labor-saving devices than our parents ever considered. Yet something is missing." When we examine their lives together, we find that there are no reliable structures. Coming and going, work and fun, and even times to talk and catch up with one another are determined by organizational demands, customer needs, or even social possibilities but not inherent commitments

inside the family. They do not have reliable structures where all the family members can give and receive support.

There are many work structures but few family structures. In other times and places, the structures were called “traditions” or “rituals.” It appears that now, for the first time, people live where they have less structure than they need instead of too much structure.

Our technological society is like a playful kitten in a spider’s web. The “web” represents family traditions and rituals. The “kitten” tears apart those traditions and rituals without malice. It simply joyfully does what it was meant to do. Most of us enjoy the new freedoms. I certainly do. The loss of structures has really not been a problem. The real problem has been that people didn’t know they lost the structures and then didn’t realize they needed to replace them with new ones. So, many people drift along with a barely conscious sense that something is missing in their lives.

For example, if you ask a large group of people how many **grew up in a family where everyone had to be there for the evening meal**, 75-90% will usually raise their hand. Then ask the same group how many people **now live in a family where everyone has to be there for the evening meal**, only about 5-15% usually raise their hand. The problem isn’t the lack of the evening meal, The point is only to raise the question of what has taken its place.

The evening meal served a function in the families where most of those people learned how to be fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives. Maybe the functions weren’t performed well, but at least there were times when people were together with opportunities to talk, listen, understand the other, make plans, see who was hurting, and share dreams. Family members could use it to manage the numerous, and sometimes complex, problems they faced. What happens in families where there is no such predictable times and the members must address even more complex problems? They need to create structures that serve the same function in their current families.

In most cultures, organized religion plays a key role in providing and supporting family traditions and rituals. Over the centuries it developed the rituals for addressing divergent problems and they became incorporated into the values which were passed from one generation to the next. People felt accepted and even righteous when they participated; and they felt guilty, ashamed or anxious when they didn’t. For the most part they didn’t spend any time considering whether or not to participate—like getting a Christmas tree for many people in the United States (at one time that was part of an organized religion). I’ll give a few examples from the Christian tradition, not because I think it is the best tradition, but because I’ve had more experience with it.

Shared Perspective: There was a time in the Christian tradition when every Sunday morning the family got up relatively early. They dressed in some of their best clothes and either got into a buggy or car, or they walked in their small group together. The point is that they were probably close enough to touch each other, let

alone close enough to talk to each other. Within a relatively short time, they got to a building or a tent or a field. In that setting, they participated in another structure familiar to them. One woman professional who had moved a lot said, “You know, the Methodist Church service is the same wherever you go. That is very comforting when you are trying to constantly manage new challenges in new places with so many different versions of how to fit in.”

Once at church, they put even more structure in their lives. Through the ritual they addressed the questions of: “Where do we fit in the universe, and in the flow of history?”

People raised in the Jewish tradition did the same thing on a different day.

Many of the grown-up children from those families changed and decided to sleep in on Sunday mornings. Often their own children are sent to church “because they need it as children.” Doing something else on Sunday mornings is fine; but when the children are sent on alone it is just one more contribution to fragmentation of the family. Everything has become so specialized that there is something specific for each age and sex. The individuals go off to specialized places to do things (work, entertainment, learn, solve personal problems, vacation, etc.) that used to be done as families. The children still need a consistent time when they can be with their parents to see how the two most important adults in their lives address the important questions and gain perspective .

Family Goals: Again in the Christian tradition, every Sunday between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the family gathered around a table or an altar. In most parts of the country, things outside were “dying,” leaving, or going dormant. The family lit a candle, read something from a book that was important to them, and then talked about the death of the old year, and the promise of birth in the new year. In other words, they talked about “Where have we been, and where do we want to go?” or “What have we become, and what do we want to become?” They were metaphorically discussing and reaffirming their goals and their dreams as a family.

When was the last time your family discussed its goals and dreams? Many families don’t do that anymore either directly or in the metaphors of death and rebirth. Leaders know how important visions and goals are. How can you run something as complex as a family without defining and sharing goals and dreams? If groups don’t share goals, they don’t have the glue to hold them together. Then when times get tough, they simply break up and go their different ways.

In the past, the vision for the family was given by authorities who interpreted the tradition. As we have become more autonomous, we can define our own goals and visions; but if we don’t do it with the group we need there will be no shared vision. Those ideals that are more important than individual wants need to be regularly articulated, shared, and updated, together if the family is to be a supportive setting during tough times.

In the United States, Thanksgiving represented more than just the beginning of Advent. The traditional dinner symbolized another important need of the family.

While all of us can remember the fights, feelings of discomfort, and other difficulties that sometimes happened at those dinners, they were also times for the extended family to get together and remember who we were. Additionally, Thanksgiving has been one of the few traditions with the specific goal of being grateful, for people of any philosophical persuasion. It was a time to get together with those people we needed and give thanks for all we have taken from this bountiful earth. As extended families have become more fragmented and Thanksgiving is more a time to start buying Christmas presents, the concept of gratitude as a way to manage our own greed, has been undermined.

This is not intended as the expression of a need for organized religion, and certainly not one particular religion. If that is a helpful structure for you that is good. But if it doesn't have meaning for you it is just as good if you remember you have some work to do. The point is that as we gained freedom from too much tradition we lost some structures, which we didn't know we needed. As we discussed above, that is always an issue with change. From a medical point of view, the religious meaning isn't important in these examples; the dependable structure to jointly address fundamental questions of life is.

Sacred Times: The religious examples were basically of protected times in a family. Times that were protected from intrusions of work, social commitments, friends, etc... They were set aside and family members could count on them. We still need such predictable, protected times. I like to call them "sacred times." That is because sacred means it should be on the top of your list of priorities and if you don't do it, you feel guilty about it. It is a time when there are no phone calls. If someone does call for anything but an emergency, he is told that you are busy at the moment and will get back with him later.

There are numerous possibilities for such protected times: Sunday morning breakfast, a special night with hot buttered rum in front of the fireplace, or the evening meal. A man in Atlanta once gave me a nice example. He said,

"You know, I had one of those times in my family. It was sacred in my daddy's family, and it is in mine—the evening meal. If you are in town, you have to be there, no excuses. I don't care if you have football practice, play practice, or whatever. If it is important enough, we will move the evening meal so you can be there.

"You pick up important information at those times. For example, I have five children, the oldest is 14 and the youngest is 4. It is hard to keep track of five kids. A while back, we observed a pattern had developed. When everybody else had finished eating, our 4-year-old was just starting to eat his dinner. That was aberrant behavior, so we investigated it.

"Then we found that the reason was when everybody else was eating, he was talking. So, we investigated that behavior. Then we discovered something we didn't like at all. The reason he was talking

while everybody else was eating was because that was the only time anybody ever listened to that boy—when they had their mouths full!”

In that great big family, that little boy was getting lost—literally getting lost. What would they have done if they didn’t have a net, a structure, to catch those people who were getting lost? Ten to fifteen years later, they might turn around and ask, “Why are you acting like that? People in our family have never acted like that!” If he knew what to say, the boy could reply, “That’s right. I’m not in your family. You see, I got lost a long time ago, and you didn’t have any way to catch those people who were getting lost.”

In one group a man challenged the idea of such structures with the question, “How do you make teenagers participate in something like that?” Another man answered with, “You don’t start when they are teenagers.” He was right. When the structures are started early enough, even teenagers will rely on them. Then they will often see to it that you participate.

On the other hand, we must admit that part of adolescence is questioning the structures laid down for us by adults. How else can they decide who they are and what they believe in? There certainly will be testing among all members of the family. And as with other structures, teenagers will want to know how strongly their parents believe in what they have directed their children to do. Structures were meant to be tested by teenagers.

Because I don’t work with children, but with successful executives, the individuals I see who sometimes get lost are the parents—most often the fathers. Early in the marriage, he says, “Listen, Honey, you take care of the kids; and I’ll go off to make some money. I’ll see you again in my late 40’s or early 50’s.” When he returns, they, in essence, ask, “Who are you? Why do you want to be included now? You have educated us for the last 15-20 years to live without you.” He finds he has to fight his way back in. Sometimes it isn’t doable.

If you have a traditional family with a husband, wife and children, it is important you find some regular time when just the parents can talk together. Even without children, it is often important to set aside a time. Otherwise, the husband and wife are like lizards in a zoo. They are in close contact and even at times resting on one another; but they treat each other like furniture, not like another important person.

Many busy spouses spend very little time talking to each other about themselves and their relationship. They constantly handle transactions about activities for the family. But they haven’t talked about their own needs, frustrations, and hopes. This has been very common among the executives and professionals who spend a day in my office examining the different parts of their lives. A common complaint of the spouse (whether the executive is a man or a woman) has been “lack of communications on a personal level.”

There is an easy structure to work on fixing that. Set aside a time when the partners will be together at least once a week in a setting where they can talk

privately. Usually the time needs to be scheduled, otherwise it is always having to be negotiated, and far too often canceled. It needs to be such that extra effort must be made to cancel it, not to schedule it. It is time without children, TV, customers, friends, the symphony, sports events, etc. At the most, any other activity should be eating in a quiet restaurant. Usually to have a meaningful conversation, one needs one and one half or two hours, for it takes some time before people can talk about personally important things.

Such times will not always be fun. Sometimes the couple will fight, for strongly-held disagreements will be a part of any good relationship. Many times the partners will just sit in silence together. But there is nothing wrong with sitting in silence with the person you love the most. Even if you don't love that person the most, you certainly have a large part of your life invested with them. The fights and periods of silence are preparation for the occasions when you will have one of those dialogues. One of you is now able to articulate what it is like to be her, how she feels about it, where her partner fits, and what she hopes to be in the future.

Beyond the important communications for the couple, it is also necessary in any group that "the bosses" get together regularly for the sake of the group. Any manager knows how difficult it is to function in an organization where the bosses don't communicate about their differences. It is also important for the bosses in the family to at least know where each other stands.

It is supportive and pragmatic to set regular times when everyone has to be present. People may talk or listen. They let each other know how they have changed either verbally or non verbally. And they have a chance to let each other know what they want their family to be. Such structures are even more important during times of great change. Unfortunately, it is during just such periods that many people feel they don't have the time.

Wound-Lickin' Place: The physical setting can also be supportive. The nicest description of a supportive physical setting I have seen was in Tolkien's Trilogy of the rings. Two times he describes such a place. As the adventurers struggle through wars, betrayal, and continuous danger, they come upon a valley ruled by an elf king. Tolkien describes the home thus:

"His house is perfect. Whether you liked food, or sleep, or work, or story telling, or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all, evil things did not come into that valley.

For our purposes, we may say "sick things did not come into that valley."

I have lived in that house. I lived in it more than once, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to go as far as I have.

When our family moved from Topeka to Chicago we had the growth producing experience of making payments on two houses at the same time. After several months, I had an occasion to consult in Topeka again. I thought I would do some manipulations on that old house, so

someone would want to pay the price we asked. I took some toothpaste for the cracks and other nonsense like that. But as I walked through the front door my mood was sudden changed. That house said, "Welcome home old friend." Now my agenda was different. Instead of attempting silly manipulations I walked through the house. I remembered, and shed a few tears. Then I said, "Thank you and good-bye."

I compared that place with the house of a patient of mine. After about a year of therapy, he became very angry one day and said, "Why can't I be in my house like my dad was in his house? On Sunday afternoons if he wanted to lay in the front room on the floor in his undershirt to take a nap, he did. In my house, I have to make sure I don't clash with the decor. I'm like another piece of furniture!" (Remember the lizards?) My question was "Why can't you lay down on the floor in the front room if you want?" That wasn't what made the man sick; but it was one of the things that was keeping him from getting well.

Maybe we can't all lie down in the front room on a Sunday afternoon in our undershirts or our slippers. Maybe we can't all live in an elf king's house. But we can all find a place that is ours where we let down our guard, relax, and lick our wounds. I like to call it a "wound-lickin' place."

One man's wound-lickin' place was downstairs in the basement where he reloaded his shotgun shells. When he went down there his wife and kids said, "Don't bother, Papa, he needs it." It was a lot of fun to shoot with him because he had more shotgun shells than anybody could ever use. But he wasn't down there to reload shells, he was down there to lick his wounds. For someone else, her wound-lickin' place is a special chair in the front room, or den, or where she has her music.

First you need to define where it is and negotiate with the rest of the family so they know it is yours. It won't work if the rest of the family needs to use it on a regular basis. Then you need to set up some psychological contracts. Someone else comes into a wound-lickin' place by invitation only. Once in, the only things others can say are some variation on the theme of "Can I help?" They never say such things as "When are you going to get to---?" or "Why haven't you done it yet?" If such things are said in a wound-lickin' place, a person runs the risk of never being able to let your guard down.

Build Personal Structures

Many of your personal structures will be tied into the structures you built for family and work. There are still a few things to consider.

There are structures to support your body. Some examples are: periodic physical and dental exams; regular physical exercise, and patterns of eating so you have a healthy diet.

There are also preset limits. What are the outside limits for your weight? Where do you set your limits on drugs, for example, sleeping pills, caffeine, or alcohol? One interesting study found that people who averaged two ounces of alcohol a day had less heart disease than teetotalers(Ref.). It appears two ounces of alcohol protects the coronary arteries. The problem is that when you move it up to three and four ounces a day, the effects of the alcohol on the rest of the heart cancels any good. With more than four ounces of alcohol, there was more heart disease than among teetotalers. We need to remember that the study was only examining heart disease and not other deleterious effects of too much alcohol. It is very easy during stressful times to feel wounded and withdraw into food, sloth, or alcohol. Then the quantity can inch its way up until it becomes an added stress. So we preset our limits.

During stressful times it is also important to be able to sleep. Interestingly, regular routines help to make sleep more efficient. P. Hauri, a sleep researcher, published his “Ten Rules For Good Sleep Hygiene.” You will see that several of them relate to reliable structures.

- Sleep only as much as you need to feel refreshed the following day. Extra sleep evidently undermines the efficiency of our sleep.
- A regular structure, particularly arousal time, helps.
- Regular exercise helps, but it should not be just before sleep.
- Loud noises disturb sleep even when the person doesn't realize it.
- A normal room temperature—cold temperatures don't help.
- Warm milk and some cheese contain amino acids, which make sleep more efficient.
- Keep sleeping pills to a minimum.
- Caffeine in the evening decreases sleep efficiency, even in people who can't feel the affect.
- Alcohol before sleep or in large amounts will interfere with sleep after the first 2-3 hours.
- At the times when you can't sleep, don't fight it. Get up and do some quiet activity, (like paper work).

Define your **personal goals** and write them down. This is surprisingly easy and surprisingly difficult to do. All you need is a blank sheet of paper, yet it is hard for many people to get started on the process. Written goals are surprisingly powerful. People talk about how surprised they were that they accomplished so much after just writing their goals.

There are many tricks to help us define our personal goals. The main thing is to define your life goals. That is the framework for your ten year goals. What do you need to accomplish in the next ten years in order to reach those life goals? Then you can define what you need to do in the next five years to accomplish those ten year goals. The life goals are the most difficult. They relate to fundamental needs and values. There are various schemes to help people define their life goals. They relate to looking back from the end of your life and seeing what you hoped to have accomplished. So one way to start is to define what you would like to have for your epitaph.

Fred Smith, an experienced executive and consultant from Dallas gave a particularly nice technique for defining what is most important for executives. He said define what four or five things are you willing to lose for? Then he gave his choices: Health; Family; Self-respect; and his Relationship with his God. If he had to give up any of those to win something he would rather lose. I particularly liked self-respect since it is so psychologically sound. To give up one's self respect just to win a title, higher salary, membership in a certain group, etc., incurs a terrible cost. Generally you also give up much of your power in the bargain.

You may share some of Smith's list. You may modify some items, such as replacing God with "Weltanschauung." You may have an entirely different list. But, if you can list the four to ten things you are willing to lose for you have your life goals, or at least a start. If you can't think of anything you are willing to lose for then you know your goal is to always win. Write it down and go on from there.

There is a problem if you have too many life goals. There is too much opportunity for conflict between your basic goals. They lose their function of giving focus, which was their purpose in the first place. Then they lose their power.

The examples of building supportive structures at work, in your family, and for yourself were not to suggest you do any of the specifics I presented. My point is simply to examine those important areas and define where you need supportive structures. Building supportive structures is a part of good managerial skills. They needn't be fancy, as none of my examples were. It is easy, once you see there is a need

OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE

Technical Knowledge

It is very easy to get out of date technically, and if the skills are required for our work, we will be stressed. Thus, continuing education programs are supportive if they relate to one's current or future work.

Technical knowledge is supportive. While most of our emphasis has been on interpersonal and personal knowledge, that does not mean technical knowledge is unimportant. Technical information is generally the most structured. In that way, it gives support. Additionally, understanding of the technical side gives a sense of mastery for a big part of most work. Part of that mastery is over one's self, for technical understanding generally requires significant self discipline.

Once you are technically competent, then you can be creative with your work. Because of the initial self-discipline required for technical mastery, some people wish to ignore it and go straight to being creative. Most often, they end up not being creative at all, but simply sloppy and self-indulgent. In the long term, that leads to frustration, rejection, and lowered self-esteem whether the work is playing the piano, painting a picture, using math, or aiding a manger.

There is a lot of technical knowledge about stress-reducing techniques. It includes relaxation exercises, medication techniques, massage, training exercises, and even diets. There is much available. All of them, even relaxation techniques require the discipline of practice.

A rather old and often forgotten piece of technical knowledge about managing stress is Hans Selye's advice. Selye discovered that when organisms stay in the same stress continually, they will eventually develop a serious illness(Ref.). While they are in the same stress, their bodies adapt and they feel quite comfortable. If they were to change their stress, they would often feel the discomfort associated with change. But, changing the stress is the very thing that is necessary for real support in the long run.

For example, one can look at the Type A personality (coronary-prone personality) as an individual who stays within the stress of constantly working against time, constantly focusing on tasks, and being competitive. When you talk to Type A's about relaxing or going on vacation, they say they would have no fun and would be "bored." But what they often don't understand is the sensation other people call "relaxation," they call "boredom." They need to be able to change their stress during the day. Working on technical problems for awhile, then working on interpersonal problems for a while, then working on very personal problems for awhile would be an overall model. In more concrete terms, it would mean moving from the stress of analyzing the numbers for a competitive advantage to the stress of laying on the floor with a four-year-old and listening to her tell you about her day.

With enough experience, those different kinds of stresses no longer result in discomfort and become pleasurable. It can be very pleasant to spend one-half hour to forty-five minutes listening to a four-year-old share with you what it is like to be her. The challenge is changing from one mode to another (as the executive said about spending time thinking about the personal side of personnel). In the old mode it would be a waste of time, but in the new one it is what you are to do.

Personal Knowledge

Then, of course, there is the more personal knowledge which supports us as we try to make it as people.

We will be supported as we gain knowledge about how we work with other people. The knowledge relates to how we function in groups. Group dynamics often require people to fit into particular roles, such as the scapegoat, the responsible one, the victim, the leader, the clown, the loyal adversary, and on and on. Each of us is inclined to be drawn into certain roles more than others. Once we understand our own vulnerability, then we can be in more conscious control of ourselves. Then we can decide whether or not we want to participate in that role. That will enable us to keep out of certain interactions that can be destructive to us. For that reason, group dynamic experiences can be very helpful, particularly if you have a skilled group leader.

Part of this is learning about power and how we use it. Power is an important aspect of family dynamics. Understanding the different forces in your own family and how you typically respond to them will enable you to better predict, negotiate, give and receive support, use humor, and find pleasure in what could otherwise be bewildering and frustrating family experiences.

Destructive Responses: There is other knowledge that sometimes we would rather not have, but which is supportive in the long run. That is understanding the destructive, yet basic and universal responses of envy, greed, and jealousy in ourselves. These are not trivial concepts. They destroy relationships and wear us out as we use them. It is never fun to learn about the unseemly side of ourselves. Knowledge of those impulses in us, however, can help us to stop unthinkingly acting on them and thus undermining our own good intentions, self esteem, and future support from others.

For example, greed has often been seen as a relatively benign, economic motivator. It isn't. It is a very destructive psychological response in which an individual consumes without being gratified. As the process goes on, not only does the person push other people away because of his demandingness, but he often wears himself out.

I have frequently seen individuals who misunderstood their greed for ambition or "standing up for themselves." They have a professional career, after obtaining a degree from a top-notch university. Their greed is expressed in terms of their statement, "I don't want to miss out on anything." They constantly work to move as high in their organization as possible, and overextend themselves financially to get into the "right" neighborhood with the "right" car, and their children attending the "right" schools. They actively participate in whatever the currently, most vogue exercise program is. They take activity-packed vacations and holidays, and try to stay up on the current art and theater. They participate in their children's school activities, and they want to have "meaningful" relationships with many different people. They often see the answer to their stress is having more "quality time" in all those different activities. What they don't realize is that no human being can reach all of her potential. Each of us has more potential than we can possibly fully reach. Instead of seeing that as one of the nice things about life, it becomes a burden for these greedy individuals.

They often want help with their "stress" because they are so worn out. Frequently, they see the problem as one of society, or their spouse, or their work, but never themselves. The answer, of course, is for them to find gratification in some of the personally more important activities they pursue. To learn that their problem resides in their own greed and not in the world around them is painful, but it is also something they could do themselves. Even if they need to get some psychotherapeutic help to address the greed which exhausts them, they will still be the one who is in charge, and finally working on the right problem.

Where do you gain this knowledge? There are many places. It will usually require some effort.

One gains personal knowledge from the humanities. Reading the classics, poetry, listening to music, or studying a good painting helps us to understand ourselves, if we are not so caught up in the techniques of the art form or our own inclination to judge them. If, instead, we see it as an opportunity to communicate with the creator (and when appropriate, the interpreter), we will discover things about ourselves. Those discoveries are rarely explicit. Most often, they slowly form over time because they are tied to the more profound information about us as human beings.

Read tough books. When we think of getting support, it is often when we feel tired and want something easy. Easy to understand books can get us started, but they often don't go far enough. If you are true to getting knowledge about yourself, some of what is written will be difficult to understand initially, and it will feel like it is the fault of the writing, not your own problem of understanding something personal about yourself. The classics, books on philosophy, and books about human relationships generally give that personal knowledge. It is sometimes presented in cumbersome ways because the ideas are difficult to put into words. One or two such books a year can be well worth the effort in terms of gaining self knowledge. Such reading can often help you to learn important things about yourself such as:

- How you fit with people who have different personality styles;
- Who can usually con you?;
- Your own unique responses to loss;
- Your own stable level of life change units;
- Your own personal growth and development issues and where those fit with the general population at your age;
- Your unique needs and how those fit with your personal wants.

INCLUDE THE PEOPLE YOU NEED IN THE INFORMATION GATHERING PROCESS

Work Through Resistances

After obtaining the knowledge we need to use it. Since we don't live in a vacuum, application of the information will often require the cooperation of other people. Particularly when it comes to making personal changes we are likely to require those we depend upon to help with us. We may just add to our stress if they oppose our efforts. That raises the problem of their learning how and why they should help.

If possible, include the people you need in the information-gathering process when it relates to the personal side of your work. If they understand the problems and the potential solutions, they are much more likely to work with you on the solutions instead of against you. They will have gone through the same process and had an opportunity to work with their own resistance to change.

The people who you need to include are the relevant people at work such as peers, subordinates, and supervisors. For that reason, in house programs tend to have more of a chance for application at work than "outhouse programs." Open seminars on the human dimension where nobody knows one another are usually

easier than programs with people who work together. Discussions can be more open because there is less personal vulnerability for the participants. On the other hand, the chance of applying the principles at work are much better with in house program, because many of the resistances were worked through together.

Particularly when addressing the human dimension of the organization, spouses have a tremendous influence. Some of the most powerful psychological contracts are with them, and a primary area of support relates to them. If spouses have not been included in programs which were not only rewarding, but intended to change their partners, they will have a hard time supporting the process.

There are two more subtle reasons why you want to include the people you need for implementation when you learn about support. These hidden resistances are related to some rather common human challenges: trust and envy.

Trust

People tend to take away from educational programs the things they believed in before they came. Everyone does it. It would be natural for you to try to implement the things you have been nagging about for years. So when you return to talk with your subordinates at work or tell your spouse at home about all the good things you heard, their response is often defensive. The person you need feels "How come everything that's to be done means I have to change? Didn't that speaker (seminar leader, book, etc.) say anything that would mean you have to change?" If you are lucky, they'll say it out loud. If you are unlucky, they will only think it to themselves.

That is not necessarily paranoid. Part of their lack of trust comes from their understanding of human reactions. It is responding to the selective memory you have because you are human. We tend to have a hard time understanding or remembering the information that is the most important for us personally. It is simply a result of normal human defenses.

The way to manage it is to find a way for them to participate with you. Then after the process you can remember what they are supposed to change; and don't worry, they will remember what you need to change.

Envy

The second problem in any educational experience is envy. Envy has been trivialized by much of our modern world. We hear things like, "She is envious of her neighbor's highly polished floor." That's not envy; that's trivial.

Charlie had spent a week off on a retreat with his company. The program contained many ideas that were applicable in the family as well as at work. He returned to his wife full of anticipation about what they could do with his new insights. He talked enthusiastically about the new concepts and how they could apply them in their family.

After he talked for five minutes, he looked into her eyes and realized he had made a serious mistake.

But he kept on, embellishing the ideas and emphasizing how useful they were. In a short time, however, he lost his good feelings about the program. Her cynical questions and nit-picking left him feeling unhappy and wondering why he was so enthused in the first place. The great ideas seemed to turn to ashes. He had provoked her envy so there was no possibility for application.

How do we understand this all too common response to something potentially beneficial. The process of envy goes like this:

I have less of something than I need to be gratified. The “something” may be love, money, attention, status, whatever. In my eyes, you have more than you need. You may be willing to give me some of what you have so I will be satisfied. But when we are all finished, you only lose enough for me to be satisfied; and there is still a difference. The problem in envy is “**I hate the difference.**” When we get all finished, you will still have more than me. The only way for me to satisfy my envy is not to take what you willingly give so that I will have enough, but to destroy what you have. When it is all finished, even though I still don’t have enough to be gratified, at least I have more than you!

Envy is the bane of any helping profession. In medicine, the patient needs more health. A doctor may appear to the patient to have a great deal of health, even enough to give help. The doctor is willing to give to the patient so that the patient feels better. If envy is a problem, however, patients will destroy all the doctor’s good work just to destroy his pleasure in helping them. The patient may refuse to take the medication that could save him, cause blowups in the family that disrupt treatment, get himself arrested, or do the very thing he was told would be dangerous for him.

Envy can undermine any educational experience. The teacher has more information than the student needs. The teacher is willing to give the information to the student. Information is something you don’t lose when you give it away. If the student accepts the knowledge, the teacher becomes a better teacher. The only way a student can satisfy his or her envy is to not learn anything. “What does that have to do with the real world?” “What are we supposed to do different on Monday morning when we get back home?” All those are ways of spoiling good information and the teacher’s pleasure.

It is not just teachers who may be envied, but anybody who has useful information.

A manager had been to a two-day seminar on managing the pressures of work. The seminar was sponsored by her husband’s organization and she took Thursday and Friday as vacation days to attend with

him. She found the program very helpful. Over the weekend the couple discussed ways to apply the ideas in their family and work.

Monday morning her boss saw her and asked how the program went. She was surprised and asked if he really wanted to know. He said he did. She began to talk enthusiastically. But, after she had only talked for three minutes, he interrupted her and asked, "By the way, did you hear that Stephanie got engaged?" She felt her face flush, and thought she had probably exposed some naivete. She never said another word about the seminar to him, and followed his lead to discuss Stephanie's engagement.

After she learned about envy, she realized that her enthusiasm about the ideas had provoked his envy. But because of the nature of the beast she felt she was at fault. He did not say, "That sounds very interesting. I wish I had been there so you would not have more knowledge than me. I need to find a way diminish your advantage." Instead, he made her feel foolish about her enthusiasm over the material. She felt too embarrassed to bring it up again. He spoiled her pleasure, enthusiasm, and their opportunity to explore any ways the new information could be used to make their work better.

Envy is not often mentioned as a cause of problems with listening. It is. And when it is a factor the person not only feels unheard, she feels some variation of shame and the consequent anger that comes when people shame us. Obviously, that not only undermines support, it interferes with the execution of new ideas and causes more problems.

Envy is subtle, for the object of it usually doesn't realize it is being used against her. Instead, she feels belittled, doubts the worth of what she had to offer, and foolish for thinking it was worth anything in the first place. That is unfortunate, because what provoked the envy was the perception that what the other had was very worthwhile. Unfortunately, to acknowledge that would make the person feel even more envious.

There are a couple of ways to handle envy. First, watch for it in yourself. It will play havoc with your support. Next, take the people you need to implement a new program with you when you get significantly new information. Then they can turn their envy on the presenter (who is paid to take it). Once the envy is discharged, the ideas can be implemented back home.

We can also diminish the likelihood of envy if we are careful not to provoke it. Presenting oneself as someone with special talents or information may seem like it will increase our own sense of worth and help sell the ideas. Unfortunately, it too often will have just the opposite effect if the other person feels there is too much difference between the two of you. Even being too enthused can provoke it in somebody who is feeling diminished at the time.

Interestingly, one defense against feeling envy ourselves is to provoke it in others. So if our own self aggrandizement causes the other person to try to provoke envy in us we can get caught up in a feed back loop that would be comical if it wasn't so painful and destructive. Indeed, if one of the partners can see humor in what he is doing and **laugh at himself** (something difficult to do in this process) he can stop his part of the process.

So if you have been to a program and got some ideas you thought were good, don't present them in a grand way. Instead, present the ideas as something that were "OK" but quite possibly not new for the listener. If it works well, then the individual will work to find what is useful in what you give.

If you recognize someone is envious of you it will sometimes work with a reasonable person to discuss the fact that he can defeat you. But if you lose, he will also lose. You do need him to implement something that would be helpful for both of you. You don't talk about envy, for that would just make him defensive. You acknowledge that he has power and can use it more to his advantage.

Including the people you need will diminish the problems of trust and envy. If you need the support of spouses to implement your changes include them in some of the important programs. Otherwise they will hear only what their partner remembered to bring home, in addition to managing their envy.

ESTABLISH PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Real People In Your Current Life

We conclude with probably the most important support of all. When studies are done on what differentiates the people who get sick after stress vs. those who remain healthy, supportive relationships are almost always a key variable (if they are part of the study). The "support system" is usually defined to include our definition of a family.

There are also important relationships outside the family. Colleagues can be powerful sources of support. They understand our work and can give practical suggestions for some of our problems there. They can give the feed back about work problems. Friends, those people who are interested in more than just our role, are a very important part. They enjoy similar pleasures. We don't have to work that much when we are around them. We understand each other's patterns.

We establish relationships with many things: our car, the front door to our office, calculating politicians, guileless dogs, the pocket that holds our keys, sports teams, T.V. programs, a watch on our left wrist, etc.. But they are not all personal. They can all give us support as we have already discussed. Here we are discussing establishing relationships with people that are personal. "Personal" means all of the person is included. If something is personal for us we care, and want to be invested in it. Some people can establish a personal relationship with a cab driver going from

the airport to their hotel. Others don't establish a personal relationship with their wife traveling from young adulthood to death.

While people can survive with a paucity of personal relationships they will miss some significant support. Personal relationships support us in ways too numerous to list here. So I will just give some examples of the more obvious ones and hope they make the point.

Personal relationships heal us by offering forgiveness—they are silly enough to like us anyway. Personal relationships guide us by giving examples and resonating with our successful attempts to make contact. They help us understand ourselves and define some of our urges. Personal relationships support by giving:

- Affirmation “Yea, I've felt like that.”
 “There is nothing that feels as good as you.”
- Admiration “You certainly have been patient.”
 “I knew you could do it.”
 “You didn't have to win for me to admire you. You only had to participate as you have always tackled such things.”
- Encouragement “So what do they know?”
 “Don't be such a dork, tell her how you feel.”
- Acceptance “Because you're my friend, that's why.”
 “That's good enough for me.”
- Acknowledgement “I can't add anything to what you have said, except 'nice work.'”
 “I know how sad you feel.”
- Nourishment “Where else do you think we would be at a time like this?”
- Appreciation “Thank you.”
 “Because you're my mother, that's why.”
- Autonomy “You and I disagree on this. I understand your points, but I think you are wrong.”
 “You're a woman now, and if it is what you think is best---.”
- Integrity “You know, nobody else believes you should do this. I guess you just have to do it because of your principles.”

There are many things we struggle with as individuals. Other members of our groups, to whom we have given personal value, can help us with challenges

which are very difficult to manage alone. They can be friends, lovers, children, or any of the people we take seriously. Relationships help us with our:

- Greed: “You’re an ass to treat her like that, and you don’t really get anything out of it except one more notch on voracious male ego.”
- Envy: “Why the fuck did you say that to him? What he said made sense, and you only put him down because he is a man!”
- Jealousy “If you love her, why don’t you feel happy when she get’s what she wants?”
- Need to learn “What are you doing? You can’t just play what is there. Listen to what happens when I accent different notes.”
- Reality testing “That’s the silliest thing I ever heard you say—maybe the silliest thing I’ve ever heard anybody say. Now listen, I’ve known you a long time, so I can say this to you ---.”
“Your being too hard on yourself.”
“Try not to take this wrong, but you look like shit.”
& Encouragement “No, I don’t think you are asking too much. If he cares as much about you as he says he does ---.”
- Need for perspective “Your father simply doesn’t know how to put his feelings into words; but doesn’t he let you know them with his eyes and his silly comments to your boy friends?”
- Examination of old assumptions “There’s that look again. Have you any idea how it makes a man feel?”
“Why do dogs drink water?”
“Why do dogs get thirsty?”
“Why do they need water to live?”
- Need for membership
& feel Special
& feel Trustworthy “This is our baby.”
“Because you’re my son.”
“You know I’ve never told anyone about that before.”
- Dependency needs “You don’t want to spend the whole weekend on that. A guy at the office will loan me a power sander and we could probably get it done on Saturday afternoon. We’ll just get a couple of beers, and maybe a portable T.V. ---”
- Responsibility “Having a baby is easy. Helping it become a man or a woman requires the time and effort.”
- Hope: “I’m sorry you failed; and I’m sorry you feel so bad. But I am glad I know you.”

Sometimes what we get from the relationship doesn't fit with what we need at the time, because the other person's empathy will also be imperfect. But, enough of the time they will be close enough to the mark to encourage, confront, guide, and heal, us as we share our lives with them. And they always add a dimension that we need in order to be whole; and which we can get no place else.

There are some special relationships that need to be mentioned. Some people will be special enough to say things that others can't risk. They will be even more supportive if we have trusted them enough to share confidences. A **confidant** is a very important personal support. One study (Ref.) found that people who didn't have a confidant had 10 times the incidence of serious depression than people who did.

A confidant is someone you can trust enough to divulge personal vulnerability. That means they must care enough to be trustworthy. It is even better if they care enough to tell you the truth, for example, something painful to hear. Then you need to care enough about them to take the truth from them. Many people may tell us the truth, but if we don't care enough for them we not only don't accept the feed back we break the relationship.

It is nice if a spouse can be a confidant, because we spend a lot of time with them and our lives are so involved with them. But all spouses don't have the ability to be a confidant. It will be of little use to try to force them into something they can't be. If your spouse can be your confidant that is terrific. If not, you simply have to find someone who can. Occasionally the issues will be tough enough that you may need to use a professional for awhile. For some people that is their first experience with a confidant, and in that relationship they learn how to establish this special relationship.

Don't forget **children**. Children need support, but they can be superb emotional supports. This does not mean adults exploit them by inappropriately using a child as a confidant, etc.. It means that you permit their own natural, healing processes to affect you. Children offer us renewed experiences with wonder, playfulness, and often unquestioning acceptance. Someone once said, "When you are down, really down, go for a romp with a kid." I would add it is even better if they are less than six; and if you have a cuddler, cuddle with him. If you have forgotten how to cuddle or romp don't worry they can teach you. As a matter of fact if you are open to learning from them they can make it irresistible.

Relationships With Yourself

The wording of the title for this section could certainly be the butt for many jokes. But it is serious. There are many resources in us. Some are too often ignored, accepted without question, or treated only impersonally.

Personal Needs: Our needs are necessary for survival. We all have the same basic needs: enough organization so we can feel in control of our lives; love; acceptance; to stand up for ourselves; food, and so forth. They will not be denied. If

they are ignored, the pressure (frustration) will mount until they are expressed one way or another. For some needs, the frustration can't last very long, for example our need for oxygen. Some needs can be frustrated for a fairly long time, as with our need for autonomy. Moreover individuals vary in their unique capacity for frustration tolerance

To live in society, we must learn how to gratify our needs in ways that don't get us extruded from our group or even killed. In different social groups, certain needs are more accepted than others. Additionally, there are both acceptable and unacceptable ways to express those needs. In some groups the need for autonomy can be expressed by bluntly telling someone else they are wrong; and then it is accepted that the different parties will get into a heated exchange. The individuals enjoy it and feel proud of themselves afterwards. In other groups, the individuals would feel shame if they even witnessed that happening with someone else. In those groups, one's autonomy is not to be expressed by openly exhibiting frank disagreement and challenge.

Some people have been taught that certain of their needs are shameful or unimportant. Most of us are more comfortable with some needs than others. Those which cause discomfort, or even shame, are likely to be avoided, and often forced out of awareness.

Ignorance of our needs leaves us open to maneuvers which gratify them in destructive or self defeating ways. The person who needs more psychological nurturance than the average, but doesn't know it, is vulnerable to causing himself problems. He may have a genetic vulnerability to alcoholism, which when combined with his chronic frustration for emotional nurturance results in alcohol abuse. Another person with the same problem may become excessively demanding for support. She demands more than ninety percent of the population is willing to give, but she thinks the problem is her husbands fault. In reality it is her higher than average dependency need caused by a genetic predisposition, early deprivation, or a combination of the two.

Willie was a great salesman. His customers loved him. He moved up in management, and was always known as the customer guy. He won them, solved problems with them, massaged the important relationships, and got a great deal of gratification from working with them. What he didn't know was that part of why he was so good was because he had a much higher than average need for psychological nurturance. In order to get the praise, special treatment, and other signs of nurturing he craved he over extended himself for customers. He did for them what he wanted done for himself. They responded with praise, invitations to special events, and ample repeat business which enabled him to make a lot of money.

As sensitive as he was to customers he was insensitive to his own support: organizational resources, subordinates, secretaries, and his wife. He demanded somewhat extravagant favors for his customers. When he was frustrated in a request he felt unappreciated by his upper

management. He complained they only talked to him when things are going wrong. For their part, his superiors felt they gave him more care and feeding than his peers. He was so good with customers that they promoted him despite the fact that he was often unavailable for meetings, didn't develop his subordinates, and was always behind in his paperwork. They didn't know the problem was that he fought to get his dependency needs gratified while ignoring the dependency needs of those who supported him.

The problem for Willie is that as he is getting older it takes a higher toll to work most nights and weekends on customer business. Some of the people he needs to support him are getting a little fed up. His wife just doesn't want to be always available for him anymore. As he moves higher in the organization he is competing with people who are tougher fighters for resources for their own projects. Now they expect him to be a sponsor for other people instead of needing his own sponsors. He is feeling chronically tired, putting on weight, and not having fun anymore. Willie needs support, but doesn't know how to get it because he doesn't understand his personal needs.

If Willie understood his needs better he could act in more effective ways to gratify them. From the beginning he could spend a little time doing for his own support systems what he does for his customers. He could remind himself that he is likely to take those in a support role for granted, because he doesn't see them as able to give him what he needs. In reality they give him a significant part of what he needs. This doesn't mean he lets customer service slide. As a matter of fact it may increase as he develops people and structures inside his own organization to better serve customers.

An informed person can also look for other ways to gratify his need for nurturance that aren't as demanding as trying to get it all in one area. Some churches are very good at giving nurturance and some parts of churches are better than others. The individual could participate in some of those activities on a regular basis. Sometimes the person may need to get some psychotherapy to find a way to manage his unique needs better. The point is that if we are unaware of our own unique needs we will mismanage them unless we are very lucky.

So, how do you know, or find out what your needs are? You do the things we have already suggested. You get feed back, get involved in the arts and literature, participate in dialogues, and introspect. And for this part of support, there is another very useful tool, when it is used competently: **psychological testing**.

Some psychological tests give excellent information on personal needs. Unfortunately many of the tests that managers use are promoted on their application to organization problems, because management isn't interested otherwise. The tests are then developed with an emphasis on how they relate to management, selling, supervision, or teaming styles. That is a pretty far stretch since we are so unique in the ways we express our needs. Putting people in a grid seems clear and is as

“uncannily on target” as astrology for most managers. So the tests are too often superficial and over generalize about application. As a matter of fact, over simplifying and discussing what you will do with a “thruster” if you are a “comforter” is just a resistance to knowing what your needs really are.

Knowing your own unique needs does have application in management, but it doesn’t fit into a cook book. This is a place where you don’t want to think about application too soon. You need to digest the data from the psychological tests for awhile. Look at how many variations we were able to show from just addressing one need—psychological nurturance or dependency. You want to use the tests to see what your needs are. Later, with much more information and analysis you can decide what you want to do about them. First, just establish this personal relationship.

There are many personal needs. We just discussed one, as an example for developing a relationship with your needs. We will discuss different one under values since needs often conflict with values and that conflict can undermine our support.

Values: Our values support our need to deal with longer term consequences. I may have the need to stand up for myself, but if I do it in a brutal, tactless way I can cut myself off from the gratification of future needs. Psychopaths, individuals without adequate values, are usually burned out by age 40. They can’t sustain themselves. In the short term, I can spoil my environment for profit. In long term, however, I or my children will pay awful consequences for that short term gratification. This function of values is reflected in the statement: “The sins of the fathers will be visited upon the sons.” When I was a son I thought that was unfair. Then I realized it didn’t have to do with fairness, but a quality of values. They help us with decisions that affect the future, even generations from now.

Values are our code for what is right or wrong, good or bad. A big part of them is concerned with what is acceptable when we deal with other people. As a very small child we learn that we can’t just do what we want to do whenever we want to do it. After a time we can not stand up for ourselves by throwing the plate of food on the floor. The people around us have ways of making us wish we hadn’t done that. After a while we may “accidentally” knock the plate on the floor. That can work for a while if those around us don’t pick up on the underlying purpose. Often they do see through our sham, however, so we have to find another way to exert our own independence. We can express our displeasure by simply not eating the food. We have learned to stick up for ourselves by refusing to participate as the rest of the group is doing, not by striking out. As we come to accept that the direct attack is not proper behavior, we are taking in an important value for our group, and everyone is pleased with us—even we are pleased. (This is also an example of coping devices which will be discussed in the next section.)

Since the consequences of our needs associated with aggression are more troublesome to the people around us there are many values that deal with being aggressive. That can leave some people with values that make sticking up for themselves very convoluted. Paradoxically, such constraints by values that are too

harsh or unrealistic can cause us to behave in ways that alienate other people. Just the opposite of what the values were intended to do.

Sally had very harsh and rigid values when it came to any expression of aggression or anger. She couldn't directly stand up for herself. She hardly ever became angry. She was very bright and was educated in technology. In that way, she could get much of what she wanted by coming up with the right answer. In her firm other people stood up for her so she could perform. She did speak out, for speaking out was acceptable to her values. It was acceptable if as it was for some idea or principle, not herself, and as long as she didn't get mad. She moved up rapidly, because she got so much done with things and ideas. Her only problem was with people.

Sally saw herself as responding in ways that were task oriented and intellectually scrupulous. As a matter of fact that was about all there was in her transactions. People were simply something to support the task. The problem was that she did stick up for herself, but in very convoluted ways. On the surface she was very accommodating. But in her transactions she nit picked, was tactless, and ignored the political realities for the "greater good" of the organization. She was often late for meetings, and once there would usually get on a point that was interesting only to her. As she moved up in the organization it became more important for her to negotiate and work through others.

The complaints about her were vague. People couldn't put their finger on why she bothered them so much. She was never hostile or angry. Her technical points were on target, and it was obvious she had some good business ideas. On the other hand, she wasn't any fun and people didn't trust her. They thought she was too political, because she often pushed her point with leaders several levels above her in inappropriate ways. The sad thing was that it was her lack of political sensitivities which made her abrasive. She refused to acknowledge the political realities like the child at dinner refused to participate in eating.

The reason the complaints about were vague was because she was so good at hiding what she did to other people. She didn't participate with them as individuals with their own needs, but as means to an end. She had to do that because she couldn't openly push for her own needs. Rejecting others' norms was a way she stood up for herself. As she ignored the hierarchy in the name of "business efficiency," she was really just ignoring the needs of other people.

Sally's problem stems from one of her values. She can't openly stick up for her own needs. She can stick up for "principles" as long as she isn't overtly aggressive. The only sign of any aggression is her "lack of awareness" of the sensitivities in the groups around her. If she doesn't change she will continue be acceptable at work, but she won't be promoted much further. What she is losing is

support. Whether or not other people can clearly define why she bothers them they know they don't like relating to her on anything, but technical problems. She has the same problem in her family. For her to get more support she needs to confront her values and make some modifications.

What kind of relationship do you have with your values? Are there some that make it unrealistically difficult to gratify some important needs? How do you know? When was the last time you seriously examined the basic assumptions of your values? Do you know what they are? Can you articulate them? When did you get those values? How old were you and what kind of world did you live in then? Are they still relevant for a person your age and in the time you are now living? Move them in the direction of being more realistic; not because you just accept today's reality, but because you are no longer an adolescent. This is the work of philosophy and theology. It is not easy work.

It takes courage to analyze, question, and discuss values. We run the risk of feeling guilty or ashamed. We can be intimidated by the fact that they seem to have always been there. Just because they are old doesn't mean they were handed down by some omniscient being. We got them from our parents, who were only grown ups passing on what they probably didn't examine too closely either. Values are far too important to go unexamined and unchanged in a world that is as fluid as ours. If we don't keep them updated they will become less of a support and more a part of the unrealistic demands on us.

Alarms: We need a relationship with our alarms in which we pay attention to them, but are not intimidated by them. If we ignore alarms we run the risk of doing damage to ourselves or our relationships. You wouldn't ignore your smoke alarm. If it was malfunctioning by going off at the wrong times you would get it fixed. Our internal alarms may malfunction for biological reasons and then we need to get them fixed, perhaps with medication. But we don't ignore them. In the case of Sally, she would have been better served if she felt anxious whenever she was about to commit an act of political foolishness.

We also need to differentiate between the various alarms. What's the use of having a smoke alarm if you can't tell the difference between it and the indicator light for a weak battery, the warning that the oil is low in the car, the burglar alarm, etc.. That sounds ridiculous, but that is just what some people do with their internal alarms. They feel them, but just call everything "nerves." There is a difference between anxiety, guilt, fear, shame, frustration, embarrassment, and they all mean different things. We have a nice system to help us, but it won't work if we don't learn what it means.

Perhaps the reason so many people don't use their alarms more effectively is that they are intimidated by them. They are so frightened of them that as soon as they feel an alarm they do something to stop it. The extreme example of this would be drug addiction. To recognize and understand something people have to spend some time with it. We don't learn about snakes if every time we see one (in reality or a book) we turn and run. Spending time is just the first step if we are to learn something. Learners are not passive, they are inquisitive, and analytical. We can do

the same thing with our alarms—analyze how they are different from one another, and what they are associated with. “Mm I wonder what I feel anxious about?” “I feel embarrassed. There is actually a feeling of warmth on my face that is part of it.”

Normal human beings can relate to their alarms with an inquisitive somewhat detached attitude, for a while. That doesn't mean they are ignoring them, just the opposite, they are studying them. Some individuals may require some therapy to learn how to do it, but that isn't necessary for most people. What is necessary is for them to understand it is possible, and useful. To respond to one's alarms like the primitive who throws up his arms and runs when he sees fire is to lose a valuable tool. And some people do just that. They avoid anything that will make them feel the slightest anxiety. They never run the risk of being embarrassed. They are as frightened of those unpleasant feelings as they were when they were small children. That is probably because they didn't get help managing unpleasant feelings as children. Perhaps their parents were just as frightened of such feelings. “Don't ask such questions, it makes me nervous!” Actually defining and understanding the feelings can diminish their intensity and sometimes cause them to go away all together.

Feelings do motivate us to act. Unpleasant feelings motivate us to get out of the situation as quickly as possible. But that is not always the best thing to do. Sometimes we need to stay involved (both physically and emotionally) as we hear out another person while she gives us a rather painful criticism. It is only then that we can realistically work on the problem, for we will then have some idea of our own role in why it is a problem. If we act too soon to stop or get away from the discomfort we won't know how to change ourselves, and will be stuck in a pattern that is not working.

So, don't be excessively alarmed by your own alarms. This means you must build tolerance for frustration, anxiety, and depression. Only then can you run the risk of questioning old values and getting meaningful feedback. While we don't chronically ignore our alarms, there are times when they are simply background noise as we try something new. Periodically we check them to make sure something hasn't developed which should concern us. And sometimes we will talk about them to try to understand them better.

We can consciously decide to tolerate some discomfort as we work to stretch ourselves, and it will work some of the time. But it can't always be done for our coping devices frequently come into play before we perceive the alarms. Thus it is also useful to have a relationship with them.

Coping Devices: As we pointed out earlier, coping devices are the same as psychological defenses. Most of our coping devices operate outside of our awareness. We have already seen examples of them when we examined how Willie did for his customers what he wanted done for himself, and Sally come late for meetings, nit picked, etc.. The behavior we see in another is the result of needs modified by values and coping. Personalities are integrated so you don't see just one aspect in pure form.

Since defenses operate at an unconscious level we can only work on them indirectly. In most cases that is not as important as knowing those defenses we are prone to use. While you may not be able to consciously change them, you can take them into consideration in your planning. That can range all the way from simply experiencing feelings without analyzing if you intellectualize too much, to seeking psychotherapy if you are prone to think in all or none terms.

Know that we use them to feel comfortable at times. “It’s funny that I can’t remember feeling anxious or depressed, I wonder if I am avoiding important life experiences just to feel comfortable.” “I wonder if I am rationalizing.” “Do you think I am discounting the significance of that mistake?”

All defenses serve a purpose, but some are more effective than others. There are some that are very beneficial. We have already mentioned **altruism**, and can see how it is a nice balance of expressing a need which is integrated with healthy values. **Anticipation** is another important coping device which we addressed when we discussed planning, writing personal goals, and even taking action to build your own support. To experience anxiety while working to understand it is using **suppression**. We are feeling the feeling while not acting on it unless it will accomplish our goals. **Humor** is one to the mature defenses we haven’t discussed.

Humor enables us to address tough issues while periodically releasing the pressure. When we use it we can work on painful problems longer. The combination of seeing reality, while turning it a bit or moving it into a different context which is a part of humor is also a part of creativity. So humor can help us come up with new solutions and then sustain our efforts as we work through the attendant changes.

City managers work in an intensely difficult and pressured situation. Their task is to bring rational management practices into an irrational political situation. I have worked with them on managing stress and change continually over the past 20 years. I have never worked with a group where I laughed more. They are witty, which I suspect is key to their survival. While staying focused on finding a solution for difficult, sometimes tragic, problems they use their humor to give the work a new perspective and help everyone sustain the effort. They not only get the job done, they also have some fun while doing it.

As with the other healthy defenses, humor contributes to staying healthy while extending ourselves. I purposely interchanged “coping devices” and “defenses” in this section so the reader could experience how they are two sides of the same coin. What others see as defenses are coping devices for the individual using them. Understanding our own coping will help us better understand the defensiveness we encounter in others. It can help us to make our own coping more mature, and less problematic.

There are some things we do that help us cope, but which are not technically called defenses (nor are they technically called coping devices). They are worth

mentioning for they do help support us and we can work on our relationship with them.

Reality testing helps us cope as, we have already discussed. It is a part of being successful. It undermines all or none thinking which will help us see more opportunities for support. We will gain more support if we work to build it on realistic possibilities. Working to compensate for any vulnerabilities we have in reality testing (such as never having any doubt) will be helpful. We can consciously work to test our perceptions of what reality is. It is often a bother, but being more realistic is worth it.

- “Even though I feel strongly that I am right we better check the numbers.”
- “I need to ask Carol how she feels, and how she thinks the kids feel.”
- “I am suspicious about feeling so comfortable with this decision, I had better see what the group thinks about it. I have learned that I ignore signs of problems when I am so enthused about something. Keith is a worrier, he may have a different view.”

To be more realistic about ourselves requires that we get some distance from ourselves in order to see how we may be different than we assume. While this can be overdone so that a person is too often detached from his life, it is necessary at times. There are times to stand outside ourselves and analyze our own role in our problems. This realistic transcendence of ourselves also helps us cope.

People From Past: People from our past help us cope. To sustain us, we have memories of: parents, teachers, mentors, siblings, and many others. Those memories are the most important factors in giving us a sense of history and continuity. Thus they are important in giving us our sense of self. They often make their presence known in our mind. Sometimes it just an impulse or a feeling about something. Sometimes it is as if we have a conversation with them. We can “hear” our father’s words of caution, disapproval, or reassurance, and we may talk back to him.

Hypnosis and guided imagery often use the technique of seeing those people in your “mind’s eye,” and talking to them (in your mind) to gain insight. Most people think of those memories as something psychiatrists work with because they cause problems in someone’s current life. In reality they help us more than they cause problems. Those people from our past should sustain us when we are alone. You have many good memories and experiences which can sustain you. Sometimes you need to be reminded to use them. Since this can seem rather vague, I will try to make the point with one last personal story.

The Arizona wilderness captivated me from the first moment I could remember seeing it. Emotionally, my family’s roots went back two generations. I was pulled away by the need to support myself, develop a profession, and an equally strong interest in the wilderness

which is inside each person. After I finished my psychiatric training and started working with executives, my brother reminded me of the attraction of the external wilderness through the work he was doing. He was working at a university. As a professional he kyacked on rivers, repelled off cliffs, and became “an outward bound instructor.” I was intrigued and visited the college.

At the college, the program was explained to me, and I hatched a private dream. I wished to take our 5-day executive seminar and put it on a river. Combining the psychiatric understanding with the “survival” understanding, I thought we would be able to offer a unique educational experience. The executives would learn how to manage the outside wilderness and inside wilderness. Both of them can be dangerous. The most important ingredient for managing both of them is understanding. I thought it would take awhile to develop the program, but didn’t realize the challenge.

Even though I was the director of seminars at the time, I couldn’t get an okay on this project. After two years of dulling my axe, I was able to hire Ron Barnes, the former vice president of the college where I had discovered the programs. His official task was to take over the seminar programs. Together, he and I agreed he would work on developing our seminar.

Five years after I had first conceived the idea, Ron and I had another one of these meetings. We thought perhaps our boss was nearly worn-down, so we pushed our points. Ron said, “Let’s either do the damn thing, or forget it once and for all!” Our exasperated boss finally said, “Okay, you guys can have your damned seminar; but remember, it’s yours! If anything goes wrong, it is your neck!”

“Wow ---, how neat - you mean I have to take some personal risk?” We got our seminar, but my neck was clearly hanging out. Ron had confidence in the outward bound group, but I had never done anything with them. We had 25 executives coming from all over the world. Even though we went through the usual routine, there was nothing to say they were in good physical health. Some were excessively overweight. Some only came to this program because their boss insisted they go to a Menninger seminar, and in their minds this one seemed to have less chance of influencing them.

Our seminar was scheduled for 73 miles of white water. It was on the last wild river of the Colorado system. Most of the year, it was a quiet stream. At its crest, though, it was a raging river. People had been killed on the river before. Once you started down the river, the only way out was at the other end of the canyon. If someone was snake bit or had a heart attack, we had to get them out the other end of the canyon. We were told even taking radios to call in a helicopter

wouldn't work because the radio waves could only go straight up from the river.

As such things go, after all the surprises, anxieties, and concerns, the day for the seminar eventually came. Our team was flying to Vernal, Utah. It takes about eight hours to fly from Topeka, Kansas, to Vernal, Utah. I found myself an isolated seat to do the work I had planned. My intent was to review all the technical issues, such as treating snake bites and hypertensive crisis; how to give lectures in the water; and group process in the field. I only spent five minutes working on those questions before I was interrupted.

You see, all these people, came to visit me! My grandfather came and said, "What's the matter, Pawdner? You've been in the mountains before. Our family lived in places like that." An old piano teacher came and said, "Look, you've dealt with tough issues before. You've performed difficult technical tasks in suboptimum conditions."

An old coach came and said, "Well, maybe that's all you can be, but I thought we gave you experiences to put more grit in your soul." My mother came and said, "As I told you before, even if you fail, I'll still love you."

That's what I needed. I didn't need to review one more time how to manage the technical issues associated with snake venom, group process, etc. If I didn't know them by then, I wasn't going to learn enough by the end of the trip. I needed to understand there was enough substance inside to give me the courage to step into the "abyss." It was time to test all the training, preparation, and experience. That's what I did and the seminar was a smashing success.

You, my patient reader, have people like that inside of you. If you didn't, you wouldn't have been able to do all you have done. During times of change, uncertainty, danger, and loss, it is important to sit back and reacquaint yourself with those people. They come quietly and often shyly. Sometimes the messages are too confused, or the initial process is more painful than necessary. Then you may need a professional's help initiating this work. Such a need is rare. Most of the time you simply need to give them an opportunity to remind you of what you have forgotten.

One man gave a nice example in a group that had just finished a guided imagery experience. They were discussing What it was like for them and if they had learned anything that could help support them. He referred to a discussion I had suggested "with any one you want." He had talked to his wife which was very rewarding. Then his voice softened and he said, "I didn't know I could trust her!" He was eager to talk to her some more in real life. She hadn't changed, he had reached a new understanding within himself. The memories he had inside himself helped him realize there was some one who would support him more than he realized.

There are many people who are estranged from important aspects of themselves. Their work with others is hampered, because they aren't familiar enough with their feelings, coping devices, or values to know when they are poisoning the well from which they must drink. Someone else would feel too anxious to blurt out the indiscretion. But the manager who has a defective relationship with his alarms doesn't know that anxiety has a function, nor does he know what it means to him specifically.

It is possible to just relate to impersonal aspects of oneself, like our role. There are people who relate only to their role. When they are outside the role, they are lost. Physicians whose family members call them, "doctor," army officers who have to speak in a commanding tone when ever there is a group of people around, engineers who can't stop looking at the mechanical side of relationships, and managers who feel lost when they aren't directing a group to produce some "deliverable." People begin to relate to the role, not to the person. The role is respected, not the person. The role is supported, not the person.

Return To Perspective

The last and most important suggestion is that you be gentle with yourself. While not backing away from realities of life, be gentle with yourself. Remember, none of us are going to get out of this thing alive anyway. It's an old joke, but it is true. We are all going to die.

So it boils down to this: "What am I willing to die for?" That is the flip side of "What am I willing to live for?" "What am I willing to wear myself out for?" Do you have goals which are founded upon a good-enough dream. In order to realistically take on your responsibilities, you must be gentle with yourself. You must be able to forgive yourself for what you have become in order to see the potential of what you can become.

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