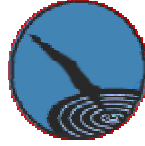




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Word of Personal Spirit

BALANCING THE INNER AND OUTER WORK OF A FACILITATOR

JoAn Maurer, M.A.
Maurer Group
3580 Fairmont Road
North Vancouver, BC V7R 2W9 Canada
Tel 604-986-8825;
Fax 604-986-4472
jmaurer@helix.net

Abstract

As facilitators we owe ourselves and our clients our full presence--to be grounded, centered, and ready for anything! We expect ourselves to be “master jugglers” as well as master facilitators, yet we all experience challenges and competing demands in our work and personal lives. In this article and in the workshop, we explore ways to balance our inner and outer work, both in our day to day lives and in our moment to moment work as facilitators. We will discuss and experience creative ways to return to balance and peace in the midst of stress and uncertainty.

Learning objectives

- Remember our values and goals in being facilitators
- Identify demands and supports in our work and personal lives
- Access intuitive wisdom to clarify priorities



- Learn creative ways to focus on our inner work

External Work

“There is more to life than merely increasing its speed.” Gandhi

A survey of Canadian employees by Aon Consulting (MacLean’s May 31, ’99) identified the top five factors that affect job satisfaction and employee commitment:

- Work/life balance
- Opportunities for personal growth
- Belief that their company satisfies customers’ needs
- Pay levels are competitive with similar organizations
- Belief that co-workers are keeping pace with the skills their jobs demand

Whether we are employees or consultants, whether we work in organizations or are self employed, I assume that facilitators have the same priorities as our clients. We, too, are motivated to find balance, yet our work is more demanding than ever. We, too, are working longer hours, commuting farther, and caring for more people--clients, children, aging parents, spouses, friends. We have so many choices to improve the quality of our lives--theater, sports and fitness, friends, family gatherings, conferences, newspapers, the internet, classes. We want to do it all and we want to do it well. We are adding balls to our juggling acts and trying to be more efficient by multi-tasking, sleeping less, and working on our lap tops and cellular phones in the car or on the train. The more our choices multiply, the more we feel trapped, drowning a sea of options. Our busyness is wearing us out, yet we wear it like a badge of courage.

Are we human doings rather than human beings?

Wayne Muller, whose book *Sabbath* I recommend, writes: *“We say I am so busy, with no small degree of pride, as if our exhaustion were a trophy, our ability to withstand stress a mark*

of real character. The busier we are, the more important we seem to ourselves, and, we imagine, to others. To be unavailable to our friends and family, to be unable to find time for the sunset (or even know that the sun has set at all), to whiz through our obligations without time for a single, mindful breath, this has become the model of a successful life.”

Ironically, we are burning ourselves out, not just from working, but also from trying to have balanced, high quality lives! Sleep deprivation is becoming a critical health issue. Sleeping on the job used to be grounds for discipline; now some companies are encouraging on the job napping because catching a few winks at the office reduces stress and errors. The Conference Board of Canada (Globe, Nov. 99) reported more than half the people they surveyed complained they are feeling anxious or stressed, tend to cut back on sleep when they need more time, and don't have enough time for themselves. On the outside we look like well fed people, but inside we are emotional anorexics.

In our heart of hearts we know we know that the loss of time to be reflective, to nourish ourselves, to pay attention to our inner messages has an impact on our effectiveness as facilitators. And that knowledge can turn into guilt that we assuage by juggling faster, further disconnecting us from ourselves.

Where are we coming from?

Take a moment to turn inward and remember the reasons you became a facilitator. What motivated you? Recall a time when you experienced the “flow,” when you had no awareness of time or yourself in your “role,” a timeless moment of being in tune completely with yourself and the group you are working with. In those times we are experiencing our core values--living from the inside out. Where are you now in your life and work path? What is your personal mission? What are you encountering on your journey as a facilitator that diverts you from your path?



Carl Jung defined four stages of life that are useful descriptors in determining our current paths. The first three life stages are related to what we want to accomplish; in these stages we are focussed on doing. The last is focused on being.

- Athlete
- Warrior
- Statesman
- Spirit: a combination of all of the above, or, consciousness.

We may be on any of these paths, whatever our age. When we are traveling on all of them at the same time, we may feel confused, lost, or burdened.

What are our demands and supports?

Stress is an engineering term that has been applied to the human organism. When there is too much force on a mechanical structure, a bridge for example, it collapses because it can't support the burden. Our bodies are similar, perhaps even more resilient. When the demands and supports are in balance, we continue to function. When the demands outweigh the supports, we begin to break down and show physical, mental, and emotional signs of stress.

Take a few minutes to complete the following exercise:

- What are some of the most demanding external demands on your time and energy? List work-related, family, community, other.
- What are some of the internal demands you place on yourself? What do you expect of yourself?
- What are the external supports in your life? Who and what do you count on?
- What are your internal supports? What renews you? How do you connect with what has purpose and meaning?

Compare your lists. How many of the same activities or people are both demands and supports? Which list is longer? What demands do you control? What supports can you increase?

We often experience demands as competing for our finite capacity of time and energy. Freud said our basic human drives are “to love and to work,” which have been translated by contemporary researchers as “intimacy and mastery” (Kofodimos). As we strive to juggle performance and relationships, action and reflection, service and self care, we experience the tension of opposites. These drives, or needs, become polarized dichotomies and we struggle to achieve the right balance between the two.

Maslow said we are driven by needs for survival, achievement, and ultimately, actualization. Is “actualization” the same as “mastery?” Maslow defined “actualized” as:

- Being independent of others opinions: Bill Cosby said, *“I don’t know the key to success but the key to failure is trying to please everybody.”* But we facilitators *want* our groups and clients to like us and appreciate our work; we *want* them to invite us back.

- Having no attachment to outcomes: Angeles Arrien said this is the way and wisdom of teachers/facilitators. But we *want* people to reach a decision, to learn from the processes we design; we *want* to see positive change as a result of our work.

- Having no investment in power over others: Sometimes we *want* people to do it our way; other times we compete with others to get the best assignment or be the best jugglers.

Inner Work

“The outward work can never be small if the inward one is great, and the outward work can never be great or good if the inward is small or of little worth.” (Miester Eckhart)

According to Eckhart, Maslow, Cosby and many other great masters, actualization, or mastery, is not about performance and looking good. It is not about our external work, even



though that is important in meeting many of our needs. Actualization is about our inner work, which is finding out or remembering who we truly are. The many popular books about soul and spirit at work, finding heart and meaning in work, are all about discovering and expressing our core values--finding our paths--or, some would say, rediscovering “I am a child of god.”

How do we rediscover ourselves?

“All my life I wanted to be somebody. Now I am and it’s not me!” (anon)

Angeles Arrien, cross cultural anthropologist, (*Four Fold Way*) says there are universal questions all cultures ask when they lose their way, or find themselves in the dark night of the soul:

- When did you stop singing?
- When did you stop dancing?
- When did you stop telling the stories of life, especially your own?
- When did you stop listening to the sweet sound of silence?

What question resonates with you?

All of these questions relate to tuning into our bodies, to primal experiences of the universal expressions of life and natural rhythms. We have lost the natural rhythm between work and rest. The rhythms of the natural world remind us that night is for rest, day is for activity; that fall and winter are seasons to be dormant, spring and summer to bloom and bear fruit; the ebb and flow of the tides are like our breathing--our lungs rest between the exhale and inhale (Muller). Beginning jugglers hold their breath; master jugglers keep breathing, calmly and smoothly, resting and returning to balance after each breath. On an airplane who do you give the oxygen to first if there is a crisis? Yourself. Then you can assist others. Our hearts, which carry

this vital life force to our cells, rest momentarily after each life giving beat. Where does the heart pump blood to first? To the heart!

What do our hearts tell us?

“Give back your heart to itself, to the stranger who has loved you.” (Derek Walcott, in David Whyte, *The Heart Aroused*)

Isn't it interesting that the Chinese pictograph for BUSY is composed of two characters: heart and killing! As well as being a vital organ for our life, our heart is symbolic of the things in life that have meaning--that give us true joy. The heart is the center of love and passion. It is the center for art, poetry, music.

We tune into our hearts through intuition, that way of knowing that invariably has the ring of truth yet we don't know how we know it. We can learn to access our intuition through creative exercises such as visualizing, using symbols and metaphors, drawing on the left side of the brain, interpreting dreams, inviting advice from real or imaginary mentors, or exploring opposites. For example, when we feel most depleted and bleak is a time to tell stories of gratitude and generosity. We will experience some of these activities in the workshop.

What is a symbol or talisman for you to help you remember what your heart tells you about balance?

“You must give birth to your images. They are the future waiting to be born.” (Rilke)

Remember the “Sabbath”

Wayne Muller suggests we can only hear our inner voice of wisdom, when we have times of rest to reconnect with our hearts. Muller uses “sabbath” as a beautiful metaphor for doing our inner work and renewing ourselves. Sabbath is like an exhaled breath: it clears the lungs and makes space for the next inhale.



Many of us know the concept from Genesis: *“God saw that everything he had made was good (self acknowledgment) and on the 7th day God ended his work and rested.”*

Most cultures and religions have times for rest, for turning inward, to restore us for the next cycle of work. In many traditions, this day is commanded for rest. In universities a sabbatical is “commanded” in the same way--to revitalize the teachers to restore their energy and creativity.

Perhaps we need such a commandment because we don’t know when to stop. All other creatures stop when the sun goes down: a hummingbird goes into a dormant state each night, so it doesn’t deplete the energy it stored during a day of feeding and flitting from flower to flower. With 24 hour access, 800 numbers, stores open all hours, we don’t go have the discipline to take time to stay in touch with the natural rhythms--to do simple restful things that restore us to ourselves--that give us balance.

Even though we may not observe a formal sabbath, we can give ourselves sabbath moments, short sabbaticals to pay attention to our inner work. We can take a day for quiet retreat, even at home, by turning off all the machines--phone, computer, washing machine, fax, television--and spending a day without external stimulation. Use that time to meditate, soak in the bath, sleep, write a letter to an old friend, look at old photos, read poetry, carve a piece of wood, listen to music. Some people set up special rituals for themselves--lighting a candle for a dinner alone, putting out flowers, walking to the store or library instead of driving. Many people turn to nature to replenish their spirits.

What sabbath moments, time outs, or gifts of inner support will you give yourself?

Finding Balance in the Moment

Taking time to rest and replenish ourselves by attending to our inner work gives us energy to do our outer work--to live our mission and values, to serve our customers well. However, as I explore balance, I keep discovering other aspects and deeper meanings. I realize that balance may not be the best descriptor of what I truly seek. "Balance" implies making either/or choices, moving back and forth between inner and outer work, weighing priorities. When I really listen to myself, my inner voice tells me what I am seeking is not balance, but peace. Balance is a means, perhaps, but not an end. "Peace" for me is a word that describes that perfect equilibrium of being fully present in the moment, in tune with oneself and others, trusting the "flow." Being at peace is also about paying attention to our shadow, or dark sides, as well as to our higher selves.

How do we return to peace in the middle of facilitating a process when we suddenly lose our way because of something triggered within by an external event? When someone disagrees with us or challenges our process? Or when we are suddenly very attached to our own desired outcomes? Or when we want to control an unruly person in the group? Or when we are thrown off by a hurtful comment? Or when we hear ourselves invalidating someone in the group? How do we draw on our inner wisdom in the midst of stressors such as these, which are common in facilitating? How, in a moment of chaos, can we return to peace?

Sometimes we aren't present and clear enough to even recognize when we are in our shadow selves--being an "athlete" wanting to prove our superiority, or a "warrior" wanting to conquer the other, or a "citizen" wanting to do good. Only after the incident can we take time to reflect and learn from what threw us off balance. Only with that insight can we forgive ourselves and take a sabbath moment to heal. And other times when we encounter a difficult moment, we just "know" what to do, how to respond, how to trust the process.



What makes the difference in our responses? What are ways you have discovered to find balance, or peace, in a moment of upset or conflict?

At this time on my journey as a facilitator, here is what I am learning to more consciously practice in those crisis moments when I “lose it:”

- Breathe and notice what is happening and name it
- Breathe and remember my intention and my symbol for peace
- Breathe and let go of my fear and perfect pictures
- Breathe and find my courage
- Breathe and act, trusting myself and the others

Like so many aspects of learning, it’s simple, but not easy!

I welcome your experiences, insight, and suggestions.

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