

Newsletter 9

RESOURCING OURSELVES ON OUR PATH TO GROUP LEADERSHIP

As an introduction to this newsletter, we wanted to offer some context for our reference material choices: throughout the pandemic, our group has been meeting weekly with the explicit goal of tending to the ‘business’ of TIGS. However, we soon identified our implicit goal, that of supporting each other and making meaning with trusted others as we navigate uncertain times. Over this time, the themes of our reading lists and newsletters have arisen organically from our conversations, and we are sharing the resources we’ve gathered in the hope that others might also find something grounding and inspiring in this eclectic collection.

Our recent discussions have focused on many of the resources we have found so helpful in our own development as group leaders, and we have been asking each other what we need going forward to address our ongoing learning needs. Our responses have been as varied as we are, and include, among others, ongoing exploration and education about particular theoretical interests, dedicated time set aside for writing and other creative pursuits.

Our Fall/Winter Reading List 2022- 2023 on the resources page of our website, focuses on *Inner Resources*. And so, we thought this newsletter might complement that list by exploring some of the external resources available to us in our various communities and systems.

“Our streets are calendars containing who we were and who we will be next.”

From Colson Whitehead’s powerful essay in the New York Times following the events of September 11th, 2001.

REFLECTING ON OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSES

In our Leadership Conversation Series, we ask each of our guest faculty to reflect on their paths to leadership, and several have mentioned important mentors in their lives. Recently our group has been talking about our own mentors and the *resource* they have offered in helping to shape our identity as group leaders.

The Oxford definition of *mentor* is, *“an experienced and trusted adviser”.*

In Greek mythology, while King Odysseus was off fighting the Trojan War, he placed his son Prince Telemachus under the guidance of a friend named Mentor to protect and teach him and to help him lead the Ithacan army. Unfortunately, Mentor failed at this job. Telemachus became insecure and it was only through the intervention of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, disguised as a wise version of Mentor, that Telemachus found his way and was able to protect his mother, Queen Penelope and become the warrior he was meant to be.

While we may be fortunate and have someone see our talent and help guide us through moments of indecision or encourage us to pursue opportunities, we often need to seek out a range of mentors through consultation, supervision, therapy or through a training program such as TIGS. The multiple pulls we face as group leaders necessitate a broad and ongoing support base.

Mentorship in Group Practice:

Our experience of being mentored goes beyond the theoretical and experiential guidance that more experienced and knowledgeable group practitioners have imparted to us. The experience of having someone see the spark and potential in us inspires us to be more courageous, take risks and lean into the many ‘edges of the unknown’ that is group therapy. Our mentors have often offered a soft place to land, where we can openly confront our mistakes, our feelings of shame, and deal with the unexpected moments that inevitably arise in our groups (whether this is done in person or through less direct, distanced mentorship found in their writings). With their knowledge, curiosity, nurturance and sharing of their own humanity, our mentors are essential resources that must not be lost to our system of group training and practice.

At The Toronto Institute of Group Studies, we are so privileged to have the opportunity to have ongoing conversations and training workshops with our mentors and continue to feel humbled and grateful for their generosity and healing nurturance.

Most recently, Molyn Leszcz offered a full-day workshop to our community about *Effective Group Leadership.* Molyn has been such an important mentor to each of us, and we are so grateful for his ongoing wisdom and friendship! In a recent article, *The Evidence-Based Group Psychotherapist,*  he explores factors that contribute to the effective practice of group leadership, including among others, use of self, therapist transparency and metacommunication.

*Molyn Leszcz (2018) The Evidence-Based Group Psychotherapist, Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 38:4, 285-298.* https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690.2018.1444853

In January, we are excited that Scott Rutan will be joining us online for a conversation with our community about *Group Leader as Group Follower*, in which we’ll explore his various insights as a seasoned group practitioner, author, teacher and mentor.

In his reflective 2014 article, *Things I have Learned,* Dr. Rutan, comments on how important it was to be able to observe and be observed and to have the opportunity to mentor students both for the capacity it builds for the recipient as well as what he receives from the experience. He encourages a *‘go forward and challenge yourself’* approach and suggests that along with having an anchor to a particular theoretical frame that we maintain an openness to the evolution of that theory and our own ongoing growth.

*Rutan, JS. Things I Have Learned, International Journal of Group Psychotherapy. 2014, 64(4), pp. 555-566.*

In her recent powerful book, *What We Owe Each Other: A New Social Contract for a Better Society*, (2021, Princeton University Press), Minouche Shafik, the Director of the London School of Economics, explores new paradigms for our societies to consider in order to survive and flourish in the context of our current and future challenges ahead.

Her chapter about education relates to our discussion above. A particular passage resonated with us:

*“I often tell student to think about their careers not like climbing a ladder, but like climbing a tree. Often you have to move sideways before going to the next level, and detours can reveal interesting new vistas. Education increasingly needs to enable people to climb trees, explore new opportunities and follow their curiosity. They also need to come down from the tree, not by jumping abruptly from the top to the ground into full retirement, but by climbing down gently via varied, partial roles as they get older.” (p. 54)*

THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTION

Resources within our System:

Over the past several years we’ve been exploring Systems Centered Theory (SCT) and recently we have been thinking a lot about ‘sustainable’ systems, including living human systems and questioning what it takes for us as individuals to continue to grow, develop and contribute to the systems of which we are a part, especially in our elder years. We’ve come to understand from SCT that sustainable systems are ones that can continually integrate difference and that the goal of every system is to survive, develop and ultimately transform. Social support and a sense of belonging are key to letting go of the familiar and embracing our vulnerability at any stage of life.

We all require a secure enough foundation to steady us as we are challenged to open our boundaries and integrate new ideas and pathways. Periods of transition are particularly vulnerable as we are challenged to embrace new identities or roles (i.e., transition to adulthood and parenthood) and the transition to ‘elderhood ‘is no exception. The Modern Elder Academy (MEA) *(*[*https://www.modernelderacademy.com/*](https://www.modernelderacademy.com/)*),* founded by entrepreneur and author Chip Conley *(Wisdom at Work - The Making of a Modern Elder)* is an online community that specifically addresses this transition and aims to challenge the negative narratives about aging so ubiquitous in Western culture. Through retreats, blogs and other resources, MEA provides a supportive holding environment to facilitate the growth of elders and prevent the loss of the wisdom and valuable resources they have to contribute to the larger system.

This need for our societies to keep mentors and resources in our systems and communities can be found in other species as well. In the March 2022 Issue of *The New York Review,* Martha C. Nussbaum writes, *What We Owe our Fellow Animals: Can we develop a theory of justice that encompasses nonhuman animals?* Martha Nussbaum is a Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago. She states that, *“Animals have evolved to be extremely good at survival strategies…”*

She goes on to reference work that notes that in both Orca and Pilot Whale families, the females live well beyond their reproductive years, suggesting they later provide another extremely important function: a *“knowledge-transmitting function: they can, in effect, serve as the group’s resident professors.”*

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2022/03/10/what-we-owe-our-fellow-animals-ethics-martha-nussbaum/>

When we don’t recognize the valuable lessons and roles that these elders and mentors offer within our various communities and wider systems, their resources are in effect lost to the system. A powerful art installation, *The Fallen 9,000,* etched into the sand on Normandy Beach commemorating World Peace Day, offers a stunning visual reminder of loss to our greater system:

<https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2013/09/the-fallen-9000/>

*The Summer Day by Mary Oliver*

*Who made the world?*

*Who made the swan, and the black bear?*

*Who made the grasshopper?*

*This grasshopper, I mean—*

*the one who has flung herself out of the grass,*

*the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,*

*who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—*

*who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.*

*Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.*

*Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.*

*I don't know exactly what a prayer is.*

*I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down*

*into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,*

*how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,*

*which is what I have been doing all day.*

*Tell me, what else should I have done?*

*Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?*

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do*

*with your one wild and precious life?*

Creative Pursuits as Resources

Rupi Kaur, a favourite poet, in the introduction to her new book, *Healing Through Words, (2022, Simon and Schuster)* writes:

*“Want to know what makes me sad? When someone tells me they’re not creative. How have we convinced millions of people that creativity is a skill only accessible to a select few, when the truth is that human beings are imaginative by nature; and it is our imaginations that have helped us survive hundreds of thousands of years. Our ability to come together, think, and solve problems is our collective creativity in motion.”*

In fact, creativity is so important to our survival that The University of Toronto, Temerty Faculty of Medicine has dedicated its Winter 2023 edition of *UofTMed* as *The Arts Issue.* “In this issue, we explore the interplay between the arts and science of medicine to shape how we learn, teach, practice and heal.”

You can read more here: [*https://uoftmedmagazine.utoronto.ca/2023-winter*](https://uoftmedmagazine.utoronto.ca/2023-winter)

In the Prologue to his exquisite classic text, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom, (original edition 1997, Harper Collins Publisher),* John O’Donohue wrote, *“Everyone is an artist. Each person brings sound out of silence and coaxes the invisible to become visible.”*

And as therapists, aren’t we encouraging our clients to engage in and recognize this process of ‘coaxing the invisible to become visible’? As we reflect on the year behind us, we wanted to acknowledge and highlight the valuable work that therapists do. In this same text, John O’Donohue quotes a master Zen Monk, *“if you do the work that you do from a loving heart, then you will always be able to make something beautiful.” (p. 160)*

He goes on to offer a blessing for your work:

*May the light of your soul guide you.
May the light of your soul bless the work you do with the*

*secret love and warmth of your heart.
May you see in what you do the beauty of your own soul.
May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and*

*renewal to those who work with you and to those who see*

*and receive your work.
May your work never weary you.
May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment,*

*inspiration and excitement.
May you be present in what you do.
May you never become lost in the bland absences.
May the day never burden you.
May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your*

*new day with dreams, possibilities and promises.
May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.
May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.
May your soul calm, console and renew you.*

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*Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole by Susan Cain, 2022, Crown Publishers.*

In this beautiful text, Cain explores the *“lessons these states of mind teach us about creativity, compassion, leadership, spirituality, mortality and love.” (Susan Cain website)*

Or if you prefer, in her Ted Talk, Susan Cain talks eloquently about longing, connection and finding beauty in sadness <https://susancain.net/bittersweet-ted-talk/>

For Future Consideration:

For a future newsletter, we thought it might be instructive and fun to examine how group therapy has been portrayed and explored in popular culture. If you have any references or resources you would like to share on this or other topics of interest, please reach out to us at: admin@tigs.co

In the meantime, you may want to check out Jonah Hill’s new documentary, *Stutz,* which just came out on Netflix, and explores his ongoing relationship with his therapist, Phil Stutz.

Respectfully submitted,

Aida Cabecinha, Susan Farrow, Maureen Mahan, Allan Sheps and Terry Simonik,

December 2022.