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### Focus on: Small Changes, Big Results

In this issue we look at small changes – shifts in attitude, perspective, and behavior – that can make huge differences in outcomes. **Dan Saint** and **Jackie Stavros**, working in a regional office of an international firm, show us the impact of asking people about their positive experiences. **Sonia March Nevis** uses the example of birds, whose individual actions result in mass migrations over thousands of miles, to talk about how each person contributes to a group's success. **Bridget Farrands** applies her teacher's urging to "love the place you're in" to help both her client and herself. **Dorothy Siminovitch** encourages coaches to enhance their practice by integrating psychological theory.

In her Leader's Blog, **Nancy Hardaway** shares how disconnecting from her usual busyness creates space for new things to emerge. I hope these articles inspire you to experiment with small changes of your own.

– *Cynthia Cook, Newsletter Editor*

### The Jefferson Wells Detroit Office Story of Small Changes

by *Daniel K. Saint and Jacqueline M. Stavros*

*"And the field is, like in modern physics, the basis of Gestalt therapy..." –Fritz Perls*

A tenet of Gestalt therapy theory is the view of the "self" as existing at the contact boundary. There is no self alone; the self exists in relationship. That concept of relational self is also foundational to appreciative inquiry (Ai). This is a story about introducing appreciative inquiry (Ai) into a professional services firm.

When we embarked on a journey of transformation three years ago, our initial goal was



*Dan Saint*

to dramatically increase employee retention. We consciously considered that to cause people to remain in the "field" of our company, we would have to change the perceptions of the contact boundary where our employees derived much of their perceptions of their professional selves.

Jefferson Wells, a subsidiary of Manpower, is a global professional services firm specializing in finance and accounting, internal audit, tax and technology risk management. The firm has approximately 50

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### Learning from the Birds: Interview with Sonia March Nevis

by *Cynthia Cook*

*I thought of Sonia when the topic of **Small Changes, Big Results** came up because of her precise focus on the small concrete details of interactions. She recently presented some "Rules for Self-Organizing Groups," which I used as a starting point for this interview.*

CC: *Where did these rules come from?*

SMN: I came to this when we began to want to train leaders. Now leaders are not looking for the depth of work that a therapist or a consultant is going to do. That's not their job. Their job is two-fold: one, they are leading a company, they have a bigger picture of what has to go on. Their second job is almost always they are running groups of one kind or another.

So there is a third thing, that they are teaching their groups to be better groups. They are teaching an area that's not their area. To train them as we train therapists and consultants would take years. So I was looking for the very thing that you are asking about – the small things that they can learn themselves because it does not take years of learning, leaving out all of the depth of it and being able to teach something that's not their area.

I got this inspiration from the Santa Fe Institute's work on the Boids – where they studied birds flocking and realized that they were talking about a simple action that is inbred in the birds, each one knows



*Sonia March Nevis*

what to do and lo and behold, magic. Small individual actions that make huge differences, they go thousands and thousands of miles together. I thought, if the birds can do

it, we should be able to do the same thing... why not?

CC: *Birds are a great model for large groups following one path together.*

SMN: Except, I know why not – we screw ourselves up with all kinds of complicated things, the birds don't know the difference, they just do it.

People who are fortunate in their early lives learn a lot of these rules. A lot of people are not fortunate in their early life and they don't learn them. These are the more psychological, interpersonal principles that have never been part of leadership training and which are critical to having meetings go well and interpersonal things go well. So really I took them off the Cycle of Experience and I made them simple, no big learning required, so that's the background of those rules.

CC: *One thing I notice is that you can implement these rules on your own, you're not dependent on any one else.*

SMN: This is very important – you can monitor on your own, you don't need anyone's

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## Coming Up at GISC:

July 20 – 24, 2008

### Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches

*"This program should be a prerequisite to coaching certification" - previous participant*

July 24 – 27, 2008

### Building Blocks of Creativity

*Increase and channel your creative energy*

August 5 – 8, 2008

### Advanced Supervision

*Bring your clinical or organizational cases*

September 11 – 14, 2008

### Nature and Transitions

*"In a frantic world, it was a rare occasion for more peaceful reflection..."*

October 5 – 8, 2008

### Finding Your Developmental Edge

*"A wonderful 'tune-up' opportunity that should be taken on a regular basis."*

October 11 – 15, 2008

### Facilitating Executive Transitions

*Based on extensive research published in **Lost in Transition***

October 16 – 19, 2008

### The Next Phase

*Learn the steps of a successful transition*

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## The Dance Between Therapy and Coaching: *When is the client difficult and can be coached, or when is therapy the answer?*

by **Dorothy E. Siminovitch, Ph.D., MCC**

There is a tension between the practice of therapy and the practice of coaching. Talk to any therapist or coach and the conversation is sure to have strong opinions and disclaimers. In the world of coaching, there has been a "rejection" of any intervention that suggests the practice of therapy and a generally accepted practice of coaches announcing disclaimers of anything that might approximate therapy.

This "divide" between the world of therapy and coaching may put the coach at risk in not being able to recognize when the "difficult" client may actually be difficult because of deep psychological problems that cannot be resolved in coaching, or when the challenges facing the client can stimulate regressive proclivities that can still be addressed in working with a competent and skilled coach. As important, the coach needs to be able to recognize when the client needs therapy and, with compassion, recommend such resources.



*Participants in 2007 Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches at GISC*

As the evolution and practice of executive coaching continues to demonstrate its value, perhaps it is now time to integrate psychological theory into the map of coaching while keeping the practice restricted to coaching.

Our workshop, "Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches" is our contribution to correcting the once necessary alienation of clinical material from coaching and to address its rightful place in the coaching endeavor. Coaches who are looking to strengthen their understanding of how individual personality and core patterns apply to coaching leaders and those who

work with them, will be introduced to the positive aspects of personality characteristics that, under stress, can emerge as regressive shadow dynamics or become activated as clinical distress.

We will review how a lens of psychological sensibility can be used to assist our clients in having a safe place to confront these dysfunctional phenomena in service of the proactive goals they are striving towards. Our intention and commitment is to have our workshop participants leave with a larger understanding of how psychological theory assists them in executive functioning—while avoiding the work of therapy.

**Dorothy E. Siminovitch, Ph.D., MCC** is Chair of the ICF-accredited International Gestalt Coaching Program (Gestalt Center for Organization & System Development), and teaches, along with Edwin Nevis, Mel Rabin and Peter Finkelstein, *Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches*, July 20 - 24, 2008 at GISC.



## Sustainability, Silence and Space in a Day: Leader's Blog

by **Nancy Hardaway**

I've been away from my work for almost 4 weeks. At first it was planned time away, and then it was forced time away. The medical details aren't important but a week of sleep followed.

My mind wasn't busy with the details of to do lists, or emails to respond to, or goals to achieve. I had to pay more attention to my body – listening to what it needed.

The combination of being present and connecting mind and body resulted in some benefits, despite the cause. I found I've cleared up my thinking on some challenging issues. Ideas germinated and because I didn't have energy to "do" anything with them or the "busyness" to ignore them, I could let them just slowly evolve, enriched by words and concepts from a couple of the books I'd been randomly perusing.

I had "soft eyes" - being able to use a soft gaze to see multiple pictures in the images in front of me. (Think of the old woman/young woman image or the vase/faces.) Being able to think of the issues differently, with softer eyes, allowed new possibilities to emerge, exciting ones. Since I don't have the energy to act on them right away, I can hold them lightly and see what else may emerge from the background.

*Read the entire posting here: [Leader's Blog](#)*

## When Small is Giant...

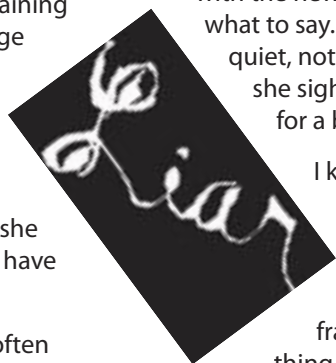
by *Bridget Farrands*

When I meet a new coaching client I find myself sometimes feeling daunted by the list of needs and requests for the changes they want to make. How will the tall, imposing and rather distant man in front of me be able to transform himself into the accessible, open, relational leader he aspires to be? Can this loud, energetic, fast-talking powerhouse of a woman ever learn to slow herself so that she can be more reflective in her work – as she claims she wants to do? As we start our work together, needs like these seem to be almost impossible.



I can talk rationally to myself: tell myself that I have been a coach for many years, remind myself of the successful encounters I have had – even be able to articulate how I work and why my approach works for people. But lately I am realising that it can be the simplest – even the smallest of things – that are transformative.

Some years ago, when I was training as a therapist, I had the privilege to be taught by Marianne Fry. She was one of those teachers who I have taken with me into many situations and whose words – usually said with a chuckle as though she were enjoying a private joke – have stayed with me.



One of her favourite sayings (often directed to me as I grumbled at having to be in a cold training room on a December weekend morning) was: if you can't be in the place you love, then love the place you're in. Such a small suggestion: but so hard to put into practice – at least then! Now I find her advice coming back to support me in a different way as I face the hurdle of apparently impossible requests from coaching clients.

Take Pamela, a mid-30s, ambitious, extravert woman recently promoted to a global role following the merger of her company with a competitor. As her evident pride and excitement at the opportunity she was being given was replaced by anxiety and self-doubt, we met to start our work. Pam's list of must-haves from coaching filled a sheet



of paper – she laughingly told me this was just the first sheet – and she was serious!

As I tried to get a word into her unstoppable flow of talking, I wondered where to start. I noticed how her talk was more a stream of verbalised thought.....one thing leading to another, to another, endlessly.

I felt hypnotised: how did she keep going for so long? Did she even realise I had stopped listening? Did she care? How had we got from the topic of her new team to her nephew's birthday? I started to time her monologues: 8 minutes, 12 minutes – even one of 16 minutes before she stopped herself.

I thought of Marianne: what did Pam love about being where she was? What did her eloquence give her that helped her, or that she enjoyed?

I put these questions to her. Silence. She started to speak, stopped, faltering as she tried to answer. She'd never thought about it before, she didn't really know, she replied. The pauses lengthened as she struggled with the new experience of not knowing what to say. I reminded myself to keep quiet, not to step in and "help". Finally she sighed and said, "It's good to stop for a bit though".

I knew this was one of the moments where the client momentarily has a glimpse of a new self, of what could be possible for her; it was the fragile moment where something transformative can arise from just a few moments of existing differently. With Marianne firmly on my shoulder, I asked Pam what was so good about stopping. As we spoke together about the minute or two of struggle she had had, I realised how such moments are gateways that can open to far larger possibilities. And how we had got there was simply to follow Marianne's advice – for both Pam and I.

*Bridget Farrands is an international organization consultant and executive coach and Co-chair of GISC's Leadership in the 21st Century Program. Bridget is also the author of Lost in Transition: How Business Leaders Can Successfully Take Charge in New*

*Roles, and will be teaching Facilitating Executive Transitions at GISC this fall. You can reach Bridget at: [bridget@farrands.co.uk](mailto:bridget@farrands.co.uk)*

## Learning from the Birds

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cooperation, so we're taking it down to its basic level, each bird does their thing and it works out. That's what a charismatic leader does, they lead their people to do things, and their people are dependent on them. The birds are dependent on nobody.

I was invited to come to one of those evangelical churches, where the pastor is charismatic, and so I went, and I'm telling you it was quite an experience, with the music and everything. At the end of it, he said, "Look at this church – it's dirty. What's going on? I want you all to go home right now and come back with your brooms and your mops!" He was giving them the rule – and they went off, and they came back with their mops and buckets and they cleaned the church. People want to be told what to do, so they don't object, they like it, they want it. That's why somebody can take over and lead into all directions.

***I like the idea of people having their rules that they accept, and that they live by, and they do it. It really comes from what are your values going to be? And can you really live them, and not just have them?***

I like the idea of people having their rules that they accept, and that they live by, and they do it. It really comes from what are your values going to be? And can you really live them, and not just have them? That pastor was teaching the people to have certain values, that they would not have come up with themselves.

*CC: These rules were developed for leaders, but anybody can help their group be more effective by following them.*

*SMN: That's right. Even if nobody else in the group is doing it, you can make the group better. You can become a good group member by following these rules.*

*CC: One rule is to scan the group. What do you mean by scan?*

**To download the rest of this interview, [click here.](#)**

## The Jefferson Wells Detroit Office Story of Small Changes *continued from page 1*

offices across North America, Europe and Asia. At year end 2004, the Detroit Office of Jefferson Wells was viewed as a solid operation, ranking 8th in total revenues and 12th in operating profit out of about 25 office profit and loss centers globally. Given the relative size of the market and troubled automotive-based Detroit economy, the performance was seen as admirable. Employee engagement was high and annual turnover ranked 4th in the firm at 32%.

### Ai as a Tool to Explore the Positive Core

A new human resources director, Jeff Martin, joined the firm in Detroit in early 2005. Shortly after that, Dan Saint, a new managing director (MD) was hired. The new MD entered the system working closely with the HR director, as the two had worked together in another firm a few years before. Jackie Stavros entered the system shortly thereafter as an advisor to the management team.

Although annual employee turnover at 32% placed them in the top quartile of the firm, they saw retention as a key lever for overall improvement. The new MD and HR director started with doing a *strategic inquiry with an appreciative intent*, having meaningful dialogue with the members of the Detroit team, clients and other stakeholders. The MD's goal was to meet every one of the employees as soon as possible, hopefully at the client organizations where they were working. Meeting clients, corporate managers and other stakeholders was also on the early agenda.

They asked each person to tell their story and they shared theirs. They asked questions to uncover the positive core of the organization: *When our firm is operating at its best, what does that look like?* They asked people to tell of their peak experiences: *How long have you been working here? What is your best experience in that time?* They asked questions to get a better sense of the values in use of the firm: *What do you value most about the firm and yourself as a member of it?*

Some of the questions were asked to uncover what the people of the firm hoped would improve and to consciously begin

moving towards a preferred future: *Imagine it is three years from now, everything has gone exceptionally well, What does our office look like? What clients are we now serving? How many people now work for the firm?* They also asked questions to get a better sense of their role and how they could best serve the team: *If we are exceptionally successful in your eyes, what would that look like? What do you expect of us? How could we best serve you?* Clients were asked to tell of their best experiences working with Jefferson Wells and to imagine how we could serve them better.

Relative Rank in Firm of Michigan Practice				
	2004	2005	2006	2007
Employee Engagement	6 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Employee Retention	6 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Client Satisfaction	8 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Revenue	8 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
Income	12 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>

Figure 1

The data uncovered from those meetings told of people feeling they were closely connected to the firm. Employees felt that the management team cared about them. Clients mentioned that we had excellent people at a fair price. They also expressed the idea of relationship and partnership.

The entry into the system was intentional. Not only did they want to uncover a positive core upon which to build, the questions were designed to identify and amplify what was already working well in the system. They were consciously co-constructing a positive future as part of their team.

As the year 2005 closed, the team felt that they were headed in the right direction. Annualized employee turnover began to decline from 32% to 26% moving the office from 6th place to 3rd in the firm. Operational and cost measures also began to improve considerably. Revenues for the year increased 49% and profits were up 53%, which resulted in the office moving from 8th to 5th place in revenues and from 12th to 7th place in profits.

### From Top-Down to Whole Systems Strategic Plan – Learning to SOAR®

The next application of Ai was in strategic planning for the office. SOAR stands for Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results, and is a whole-system, Ai-based framework for strategic planning and implementation. It is a *strategic inquiry with appreciative intent* into what works best

and what are the best possible opportunities for growth, along with how to get the whole system involved in the process.

Through a series of group meetings culminating in a summit of all employees, the strategic plan for 2007 was completed. Everyone in the organization had some degree of ownership and pride in the future direction of the firm locally. The dissemination and implementation of the strategy had begun simultaneously with the research and planning phase of the strategy process.

### The Results

Over the three years from early 2005 to late 2007, annual employee turnover did drop dramatically—from 32% to a low of 7%. And, employee engagement increased. Detroit moved from 6th in the firm to 1st of all large offices over that period. The change in the HR measures drove profound change in operational and financial measures also. At year end 2007, Detroit was 1st in the firm among all offices globally in profits, revenues, employee engagement, employee retention, and client satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the change in relative ranking within the firm year by year.

For 2005, the office won the Manpower Global Award for Operational Excellence and for 2006 and 2007 the Detroit Office won the firm's highest award, Office of the Year.

Of course, Ai and SOAR do not account for all of the changes in results over time. Having a great caring team and great clients to serve are probably much larger variables in the equation; however, Ai and related processes helped to inspire and channel the passion, skills and commitment of the team.

*Dan Saint, Ph.D., is the Managing Director of Jefferson Wells in the Great Lakes Region, leading a practice with approximately 300 client service professionals. With a wealth of over 25 years of international experience, he brings high energy, care and understanding to the complex challenges of human systems.*

*Jackie Stavros, E.D.M., has 20 years of strategic planning, marketing, international and organizational change experience. She is an Associate Professor for the Graduate College of Management, Lawrence Technological University and has co-authored books, book chapters and several articles.*



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