



Gestalt International Study Center Newsletter

Focus on: Intimacy & Strategy

Number 2, April 2007

In this newsletter we focus on a useful way to increase the effectiveness of interactions between people that we call “balancing intimate and strategic behaviors.” The article below by **Penny Backman** and **Edwin Nevis** describes how this theory -- and the very structure of GISC -- has evolved through bringing clinicians, organizational practitioners and executives together. **Sonia Nevis** writes about her experience teaching these concepts to people involved in government and social change in South Africa. We speak with **Nick Sarillo**, a successful restaurateur, to hear his real-life experience applying this theory in his business, and **Nancy Hardaway** shares how she shifts from strategic to intimate concerns in her Leader’s Log.

We hope you enjoy, and learn, and pass this newsletter on to others!

GISC: Evolving and Embodying our Theory by Penny Backman & Edwin Nevis

GISC has decided to eliminate the separate centers, Center for the Study of Intimate Systems and Center for the Study of Strategic Systems, and merge their work under the umbrella of GISC. As our thinking about working in these different settings has evolved, we have shifted our focus from the kind of **system** to looking at intimate and strategic **behaviors**, recognizing that the correct balance of both kinds of interactions needs to be found in every situation, regardless of the setting.

Over the course of thirty years teaching clinical and organizational practitioners, we have learned that working with families and working with organizations have more in common than you might think.

A family is like a business, in that it has a hierarchy (parents and kids), functions to perform (get the kids out the door in time to catch the school bus), and goals to achieve (save enough money for that new car).

A business is like a family, in that it depends on the quality of the relationships between people in order to function well. A company’s ability to fulfill a rush order, for example, often depends on how well the production manager and sales person get along.

We have labeled these two ways of functioning “strategic” and “intimate.” Thirty years ago we started developing our Gestalt approach to working with intimate and strategic systems – intimate systems being couples, families, close friends, where the

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Gestalt Values Create a Recipe for Business Success: Interview with Nick Sarillo by Cynthia Cook

GISC student, and a presenter at the Creating a High-Performance Culture conference in June, Nick Sarillo is owner of Nick’s Pizza and Pub in Chicago. Since Nick and others in his company have studied extensively with us, we were interested in hearing how he has applied what he has learned.

Nick started the business 12 years ago with his first restaurant. He now has two restaurants seating 350 each, 200 staff plus administration, and is on target to open a third in 2008. Featured in a four-part Newsweek series, Nick’s Pizza and Pub has a profit rate three times the industry average. However, it wasn’t just the size and growth of the business that interested Newsweek; but also how they run their business and take care of their team, their high retention rate, and their community involvement.



Nick Sarillo

GISC: What is it about the Gestalt approach that got you interested in being involved in an ongoing way?

NS: Wow, there is so much. Most important is being in the present moment and tracking what is actually going on in the experience (the Cycle of Experience Model) and having a method for intervening and a way for things to move forward, whether the person or the issue.

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Leader's Log: Intimate Meetings & Strategic Moments by Nancy Hardaway

Day 32 – A month and I have finally moved my files from the top of my desk, and set up a system. It is a concrete reflection of my feeling more settled in. I've been on my own for a few weeks and now Ed and Sonia are coming back for a week, and then off again. It's good to have them both around as a resource, and then gone so I can settle into my role and have to rely on myself.

Day 35 –Generosity. Is generosity a resource? It makes a dramatic difference whether it is abundant or in short supply. It's wonderful to work in a place where generosity is abundant.

Day 38 – Mel Bucholtz and I just talked about the fact that differences are not only accepted here, they are celebrated. We also talked about creativity, and how we could offer a workshop in helping people unleash their creativity. The Gestalt principle of accepting ourselves is such a foundation for opening to our creativity. It's the editor/critical voice that stops people.

Day 46 – In joining the area graduates of the Leadership Program in a monthly meeting, I discovered the power of reinforcement. We talked about how we use inquiry and advocacy in running meetings, and when we forget. We talked about the need for the "pause" - the time between meetings, or other activities to collect ourselves, to complete the experience, before we move on. Immediately today, I'm finding myself actively using the skills.

Day 51 – How to find the right language to talk about our programs is so difficult. Cynthia just left and we were struggling with accessible language for the new Professional Development and Executive Development and Leadership brochures. These programs are so profound but the words aren't. What is important to say about the experiences? How do we better articulate benefits and outcomes?

Day 55 – We have this Strategic Planning meeting coming up with the Board and Faculty and I'm realizing that this is a transitional meeting – the first I will run. I keep feeling like something is missing. We have the strategic agenda but not the experience. I want everyone who comes to know how well the transition is going, for me, for Ed and for Sonia. But how to bring everyone into their own experience of the transition? They need to feel it, not just read about it. This transition isn't about me. It is about us – the community.

Day 61 – Just came back from Marconi Beach. Wow, was it cold! I was the only one there, not even a seagull to keep me company. I realized once I was there that it was exactly what I needed. The expansive endless ribbon of sand and ocean and sky. The panorama. Big picture thinking. Details aren't important. Also timelessness. Nothing has to happen at this moment. The waves will keep coming in. And there's a rhythm to pay attention to.

Day 65 – Portland. What great people we met at Kathy Greenleaf's house. And what a vibrant gathering of GISC graduates at Joe Melnick's house. Ideas. Connections. Wonderful energy coming in after two months in the quiet woods of Wellfleet, my first public appearance in the new role. It's amazing how all the people talked about the impact of GISC on their lives, or their work. There's also a strength in numbers – they can reinforce each other within their companies, within their community. We need to support that.

Day 68 – Sat in on the beginning of the Gestalt Review Editors meeting, and got to meet Rick Mauer and Liv Estrup. Their passion for excellence and their caring for each other was so evident.

Day 75 – The Strategy Meeting is tonight and we're in the midst of a major snowstorm. Let's just add a little challenge. I want a metaphor for the structure that I think we need to find as a group to guide us together as we go forward. Like the cage that holds up a tomato plant. It still is going to grow the way it wants to but with the support of the cage, it gets more sunlight, and air, and moisture and none of the tomatoes rot.

***We are committed to continue
to grow, to be provocative, to push
the theory in new directions***

Day 76 – What an amazing group of people we have gathered in our Strategic Circle. Only here could we sense all the emotion around

this transition, and rail at the agenda, and still move through it. There is so much love that connects us to GISC. We are proud of the theory and practice that builds self awareness and skills for being together, in a way that doesn't exist anywhere else. We can explore the new, and experiment. We are authentic and accepting. We are committed to continue to grow, to be provocative, to push the theory in new directions.

Day 78 – Leadership students arrive today. And on Friday more than twenty arrive for Women and the World. The season begins. We're ready.

Day 86 – Last week, sitting in the big classroom listening to the significant impact of the program on all the Leadership graduates, my many experiences as a student came rushing back. Then this week I had my first faculty role with Deb Stewart and Sonia, in a moving weekend with 20 women for Women in the World. The Center is waking up for the season and I'm finding how many roles I play here.

Nancy Hardaway is President and CEO of GISC. She invites your comments and feedback. Contact her at nhardaway@gisc.org



GISC: Evolving and Embodying our Theory

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relationship itself is what is important and strategy is secondary, and strategic systems, where the focus is on accomplishing a goal, and relationships are secondary.

This principle evolved initially out of the work of the Center for the Study of Intimate Systems (CSIS), created in Cleveland in 1975, and primarily concerned with teaching people to make better connections – to improve their intimate lives. When teaching how to intervene in an intimate system (a family), Sonia Nevis would sometimes say, “Be bold. Have full power in the moment you intervene.” When pushed to explain, she said, “Sometimes you need to be strategic. You are directing awareness and action.”

Over the years, the CSIS faculty became aware that they used the word “strategic” more and more. Sonia remembers saying, “I’m taking my therapist hat off.” She then strategized with a client, offering action steps such as, “Get that job done today, dress a little better for the job interview.” Thoughtful, goal-oriented interventions belong in families as well as in organizations.

As more and more organization consultants and executives studied in CSIS’s “Couple & Family Training Program” (now known as the Cape Cod Training Program) and became part of our learning community, they heightened our awareness that goal-oriented systems also require solid connectedness among their members. We asked some of them to become part of CSIS, but they countered with the suggestion that the strategic interest might have a center of its own. Thus, in 2001, Rob Farrands, Bridget Farrands, Margareta Marmgren, Lars Marmgren, and Edwin Nevis created a GISC sub-center: the Center for the Study of Strategic Systems (CSSS). For several years this Center conducted its own study groups and conferences.

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Each Center had the same basic goal: understanding human systems and teaching people how to intervene in making them better. When we talked to each other, we knew that each Center taught process observation and consultation as well as how to weave in and out of strategic action. For a balance in each category of behaviors, to achieve flexibility in changing circumstances, there needs to be a seamless braid of intimacy and strategy. This theory is articulated in the article, “Connecting Intimate and Strategic Interactions: The Need for Balance” (Gestalt Review, Volume 7, Number 2).

The two Centers were already interwoven by students and faculty, and it became crystal clear that, in theory and in practice, the Centers belonged together. We have adjusted our organizational structure accordingly. As we continue to bring people from different disciplines and areas of practice together, we plan to expand our knowledge and practice in this area in the years to come.

Penny Backman has been a member of the CCTP faculty since 1999. Edwin Nevis helped found the Organization & Systems Development Program of the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland in 1977, and is co-founder and Board Chair of GISC.

On Transporting the Cape Cod Model to South Africa by Sonia March Nevis

Chantelle Wyley and Jochen Lohmeier invited us to teach the Cape Cod Model Program in their country after they had been participants of it in the US. They recruited a group of South African people composed of executives and program implementers in the government service and related organizational consultants. The group also included a member of the South African Parliament and an executive at the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

I was afraid of the long trip from Cape Cod to Cape Town in South Africa, afraid of exhaustion. The trip turned out to be easy, – from Cape Cod to Boston to Amsterdam to Cape town and then back from Cape town to Johannesburg to Paris to Boston to home. We benefited from the miracle of all flights being on time and having practically no jet lag.



I was afraid of the strangeness of a different culture and of different expectations from the participants. I learned again that groups of people are much the same, and individuals within the group are all different – each unique and complex and interesting. One thing that did stand out about people was that all 35 participants expressed deep motivation to improve their country.

Three of us from the US – Donna Colombel, Edwin Nevis, and myself – and three of us from Africa – Jochen, Chantelle and John Nkum (Ghana) – comprised the faculty. We turned out to be a great team even though we had never before worked together, and I was there without the support of my usual super faculty at the Center.

We were well received, so much so that I was tempted to come back to participate to the second half of the program. I resisted the temptation, knowing that the faculty for the next session is equally excellent and the differences will enhance the program. Just now, the telephone rang and it was Carol Brockmon, a member of the CCTP faculty. She and Stuart Simon – also on the faculty – had just finished an introduction to the CCTP program in Philadelphia. They were very pleased with the feedback. Carol said she called to remind me that what we bring to people is a powerful way of intervening, and that the Model can be presented by many different people who have practiced it until it is assimilated.

A moment before this telephone call I had been wondering how I was going to end this note to you all. I want to end it by telling you that I’m now sure that the work I have done for these last forty years or so is so assimilated by so many that I know that it will go on influencing organizations, couples and families long after I am gone. I am honored.

Sonia March Nevis is Dean of Faculty at GISC, and has been teaching and practicing Gestalt therapy for 50 years. Her next email letter, coming in May, will focus on religion.

Gestalt Values Create a Recipe for Business Success: Interview with Nick Sarillo

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GISC: What has the impact of the Gestalt approach been on your business?

NS: I think the biggest impact has been in our training and coaching model, that's true Gestalt. After orientation, how you are trained is integrated with our coaching model and how we give feedback. We are training you in our science, but also throughout the training we pay attention to positives, what you are doing well, and reinforcing those aspects instead of all of the negatives. This is so much from what I got out of Gestalt.

GISC: Since implementing this approach, how is your organization different?

NS: The number one way it shows up is a positive work environment. There is amazing energy in the team. People actually look forward to coming to work. The more tangible piece is our retention. In the restaurant business turnover is a big issue. We spend money on training and retention instead of turnover. We use this model from executives to dishwasher. (According to the Newsweek article, Nick's Pizza & Pub has a 20% turnover rate, as compared to 150% for the restaurant industry as a whole.)

GISC: How did you get involved with the Gestalt approach?

NS: I always believed in people. I believe people don't get out of bed saying I want to screw up today, people want to do the best they can. So I was looking for ways to make the restaurant a good place to work. After working with Rudy Miick [of Miick and Associates], I asked him how he was trained because I loved it and I was hungry for understanding at a deeper level. That's when I began my own development. I took the workshop on "Balancing Intimate and Strategic Interactions," which was awesome in helping me understand myself and I brought those concepts back to the leaders and managers of my company and used it as a ground for our training and coaching.

GISC: The word "intimacy" can be off-putting to executives but you use it in your organization. How would you define it?

NS: In the context of the coaching we do, "intimate" isn't a place of lovey-doveyness, it's connecting and getting to know our staff, what do they do outside of work, getting to know them from an empathetic place. Once you build the intimate ground, you then have opportunity to coach and direct them in a more strategic way when you need to. Like in the middle of a Friday night rush you can be more directive, this is what I need you to do right now. And they are comfortable and can accept it. But

without the intimate ground creation first, they just resent it.

GISC: What difference has it made to you personally as a leader in your organization?

NS: It helped me a lot to learn that I came from a family that found intimacy through being strategic. I could see that when I liked someone on our team, the closer I got to them and liked them, the tougher I was on them. I didn't understand about building the intimate ground. It really supported my effectiveness as a leader to understand that in myself. My intentions were great but my impact didn't match, and I needed to get my intentions and impact to match up.

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GISC: Executives often get skeptical about talking about family dynamics and intimacy. You've shown how it's helped you create a thriving organization.

NS: I don't talk about my family dynamics with my team but understanding them has made me more effective, and will make others more effective. That's a fact. When I first came back from the training, people said, "You are so different. You have a different presence about you."

GISC: In addition to your amazing employee retention rate, what would you say to other executives about the benefits of incorporating the Gestalt approach?

NS: It's hard for executives. We want something tangible to track, and the benefits are not always tangible. It's always a challenge to articulate the benefits. I want to make it clear so that more people will understand the impact it's had on our business and the potential for every business to be as successful as we have been with these concepts. It's not just theoretical, it really works.

Nick, along with other business leaders, will be speaking about how he has incorporated the Gestalt approach in his business at "Creating a High-Performance Culture: Leaders Apply the Gestalt Approach," a conference at GISC June 21 – 24. To learn more about Nick's Pizza & Pub, or for links to the Newsweek series, visit: www.nickspizzapub.com

Coming Up at GISC: *Confronting Executive Challenges • The Next Phase • The Tuning Effect • Leading Nonprofit Organizations • Creating a High-Performance Culture: Leaders Apply the Gestalt Approach* • visit our website for details: www.gisc.org

Next Newsletter Topic: Optimism, June 2007

Gestalt International Study Center offers programs for personal, professional and executive development, to help people connect in ways that lead to action, change, and growth.

