



Gestalt International Study Center Newsletter

Transforming the way we live and work in the world

Focus on: Power

Number 4, September 2007

Power – such a provocative concept! In this issue we look at power from several different angles. **Paul Rookwood**, cochair of our leadership development program, discusses leading by developing “followership.” **Nancy Hardaway** and **Deborah Stewart**, who teach “Women in the Working World,” discuss power from that perspective, and **Eleanor Hooks** talks about the power in discovering what you can say yes to. **Sean Gaffney** looks at power from a cross-cultural perspective, and **Nancy’s** Leader’s Log shows the energy that flows in and out of GISC from many different directions. We have also included an excerpt from “The Myth of Power,” by **Penny Backman** and **Sonia Nevis**. Read, enjoy, and pass along.

We are also pleased to announce that our 2008 catalogue is now available! [Click here to download.](#)

Paradoxical Leadership: Interview with Paul Rookwood by Cynthia Cook

Paul Rookwood is a business executive and co-chair of Leadership in the 21st Century, GISC’s leadership development program. Paul was recently at the Center teaching a class of leadership program graduates, and I spoke with him about power in the context of leadership.

GISC: What comes to mind when you think about power in the context of leadership?

PR: In the company I run we have a group of young, bright, highly educated individuals who don’t want to be managed or told what to do – but they do want to be led.

The paradox is that if I try to tell them what to do, I get nowhere. Whereas if I create the conditions where they can engage with me, the result is followership. You can appear powerful, but if you can’t get people to follow you are you really leading and changing anything?

GISC: Have your experiences with GISC helped you with this?

PR: It becomes a tactical engagement around using intimate and strategic ways of relating. A major piece of learning that I got here at GISC was where my comfort level was with each of these modes or styles of contact. I was fortunate to be welcomed into a job with a company that has a consensus-oriented decision-making style, a good fit with my comfort level with



Paul Rookwood

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Thoughts on Women and Power: A Dialogue by Nancy Hardaway & Deborah Stewart

DS: I’m daunted by this topic. Where do we start?

NH: Remember the article Sonia Nevis and Penny Backman wrote? It said that power is not in any one person, but between people. Both people make a contribution to how power is perceived and shared. I know that when I don’t feel powerful I co-create a reality of giving power to the other. Why do you think power is such a big issue for women?

DS: Power is usually seen as hierarchical, so it feels non-relational and non-cooperative. Last week four girls visited us, ranging in age from nine to thirteen. Every time they had an upset it was relational: someone felt put down or left out. Carol Gilligan’s work – all the way back to her book *In a Different Voice* – was validated daily!

NH: I’ve been wondering if women are especially uncomfortable or unfamiliar with hierarchical power relationships between women. Women are used to men being in the top part of hierarchy, but maybe we don’t know how to deal with other women in a non-intimate way. Remember that Deborah Tannen article from Harvard Business Review “The Power of Talk,” about girls’ play being equalizing and boys’ play being hierarchical. What do you think is the difference between power and influence?

DS: I’d say that power is the ability to mandate something, whereas influence is more persuasive and motivational.

NH: The dictionary says influence is power exerted over minds or behavior of others, whereas power is the right or prerogative of

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Leader's Log: Sitting in the Flow of Power by Nancy Hardaway

Day 160 — Where does power sit in an organization? In the space between the willingness of the leader to accept responsibility and the willingness of the rest to follow? In the giving and receiving of authority? In the willingness of the leader to share power at times? It seems fluid in nature. Where is power in a collaborative organization like GISC, where more than any other place it must be shared?

Day 168 — I've been struck throughout the days of our conference on High Performing Organizations, how it is possible to operationalize the theory and practice we teach at GISC. The Cycle of Experience seems evident in the transparency that exists in each company as they share information with their employees – shared awareness moving them to faster acceptance of change and action. The Cape Cod Model of creating change through positive feedback worked in these organizations to build extraordinary levels of employee retention – in one case, where industry turnover averaged 150%, they achieved 28%. Recognition of multiple realities leads to looking for higher levels of customer contact – what is the customer's reality? That these concepts – that lead to high levels of personal interaction, skilled consulting, therapy, and coaching – can also lead to exceptional bottom line results is not surprising, but certainly powerful to hear validated.

Day 174 — I'm excited that our strategic planning committee gathered together with a growing sense of optimism and possibility. The level of interest in our programs from an ever-widening circle, the testimonials to the profound impact of the experiences, confirm the value of what we do. The exercise I gave them to look at our program catalogue through the eyes of a stranger is helping us more clearly define what we do best. It is so concrete. Our new R&D committee is a great step toward intentionally continuing support for the development of new theory and practice at GISC.

Day 180 — So many people have responded to our program survey – amazing to read all the comments from nearby and around the world – requests for programs in Hong Kong, India, Australia. We can't respond to everything but we need to respond to the many requests for the course on balancing intimacy and strategy, managing change, more application of the Cape Cod Model to coaching, and more on optimism. They're topics we were already working on so they should be possible for '08.

Day 184 — I realize (just like our students in our programs realize) that our growth and change at GISC comes through building on our core competencies: the Cape Cod Model of creating

change through positive feedback, and our model of influential leadership, our process of transition. We need to provide ways for people to experience these concepts with a smaller commitment of time and money. And ways to build on the programs – advanced offerings. We already have courses of study but we need to fill in the gaps.

Day 188 — Program planning is like a huge jigsaw puzzle that you aren't even sure you have all the pieces to. Each month of 2008 is a sheet on my office wall, all the holidays marked. Each course is a colored sticky note. I'm seeing sticky notes in my sleep. Make sure we have introductory and advanced offerings throughout the year, that we're offering programs that meet the needs of consultants, executives, therapists, coaches and people interested in personal growth, that we're avoiding holidays, that we have programs during European vacation. That the short programs are back to back so people who have far to travel can take two at once. Then make sure the dates work with the faculties' calendars. I hope the sticky notes don't fall down before we're done.

Day 205 — Is there a light at the end of the tunnel? We're closing on a new catalogue design that will be easier to use. With so many testimonials we can include the voices of our students throughout. The experiences they take with them when they leave and how they use those experiences in their lives tell our story. In the book *Blink* on how to make messages memorable, there is an emphasis on concrete language and telling stories. I hope we've succeeded. Since it's different than our old catalogue, I know to expect resistance. We are growing in clarity and complexity, yet we have the same intimacy of spirit, the value of authenticity and connection. Does it come across? Can't wait any longer – let it go and move on.

Day 210 — The customized programs for the companies that have come over from Scandinavia this month are going well. I keep hearing that our practice of group interaction is accessible and transforming. So different from what they find anywhere else.

Day 221 — August is ending and already I lean longingly back toward the earlier sunrises and later sunsets of early summer. I resist the change of the seasons and grieve the loss of daylight. And we grieve for the loss of family members of close friends of GISC. I look out my window at the bike path and the parade of vacationers speeding by on their bikes. The sun is filtering through the trees, trickling onto the face of the sculpture in the hollow like golden tears. I'm eight months at GISC today and I am accepting the power of the position, and the willingness of others to join with me. Transitions take time.

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

Coming Up at GISC:

- **Mastering the Art of Optimism** October 12 - 14, 2007
- **The Next Phase: A Program for Transition & Renewal** October 18 - 21, 2007
- **Leadership in the 21st Century** Next Program begins October 21 - 26, 2007

- **Applying the Cape Cod Model in Organizations** October 28 - November 2, 2007
- **Making Significant Life Choices A Workshop for Couples** November 2 - 4, 2007
- **Introduction to the Cape Cod Model (Boston)** December 1 - 2, 2007

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Paradoxical Leadership *continued from Page 1*

interpersonal dialogue. It has also been interesting to play with my awareness of other choices and explore going beyond my comfort level by using a more “dictatorial” style where needed. The Gestalt frame of having a well-developed side has a corollary of there being a less-developed side. Gestalt has helped me broaden the range of tools I use in a business setting.

GISC: Can you say more about “followership?”

PR: I’ve been able to engender a powerful response from the organization that I lead in a paradoxical way, by sitting back, and getting other people mobilized to do things, instead of telling them what to do. It is astounding to me how powerful it is to be invited to really contribute. So if as a leader I genuinely welcome you in, make space for you, am interested in your perspective – it is a way of energizing the person and engendering followership by making them participate.

GISC: This is very different from the conventional view of power.

PR: We all know the archetype of the individual hero, and the leader as hero, but you can be much more powerful by creating field conditions in which you mobilize other people’s energy. This is also more sustainable for the organization. The experience of working for someone with a dictatorial style is that there is no space for me in this, my contribution isn’t valued. It shuts you down. How will you be willing to put energy forward in a meaningful way? When you stay dictatorial, nothing happens without you – because those are the conditions you have created.

If your image of being powerful is that change has to happen exactly the way you conceive it, then maybe you do need to be a dictator. But if you are interested in creating change, it is much more powerful to harness the energy of many points of view. I am more interested in creating a culture in which the organization can thrive independent of the individual. I’m not interested in making the world in my own image.

GISC: In a sense, working smarter as a leader, not harder.

PR: In the class today, we asked everyone to tell a story about an experience of leadership since the training program. It was remarkable how each one in a different way described the same experience, of a time when they sat back, or slowed down, calmed down, or got quiet – that had a powerful effect.

GISC: Any closing thoughts?

PR: I am reminded that in the notebooks we hand out in the leadership program, there is a quote from Lao-Tzu about the most powerful person being the invisible one. If we look at power through that lens, it is about being much more powerful in a way that appears to be less so. If all you are doing is your own thing, there’s not much leverage there. My company doesn’t take contracts where we are only working with one individual. If you create an organization in which 20 people are doing their own thing, you have generated so much more power.

Our 2008 catalogue is now available!

Offering leadership development, advanced professional training and programs for personal development for coaches, consultants, executives and clinicians .

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**A Positive No by Eleanor Hooks**

Thich Nhat Hanh in his latest book, *The Art of Power* (2007), reminds us that power is within the present moment...of our lives. We have access to power always in how we choose to experience our lives and our relationships to others. In today’s workplace, power is seen as a commodity that only a few have access to based on their position. I agree with Thich Nhat Hanh in theory, because I believe that power is an inner experience. The trouble with the theory is that we are influenced by the power of others. I don’t have any more power than anyone else, so when I connect with another there is a likelihood that I will be influenced by that person. There is only one way that I’m aware of to manage that influence – saying “no” to anything that does not feel good, but almost in an instant recognizing and imagining what I would prefer, in other words, finding something to which I can say “yes.” William Ury, Harvard professor and principal in the famed Harvard Negotiation Project, has written a book called *The Power of a Positive NO* (2007). The word “no” has great power if it leads to “yes.” Being clear about what you value, what you want and how you feel are keys to uncovering the essential power of “no.”

The power is in the choices we make, so when we use our emotions, our compassion, our inner power, to make choices that are meaningful for us, we are fully engaged with our work and life experiences.

Unfortunately, compassion in particular is often left out of the workplace, especially in workplace relationships. We look at people and judge them; instead we could look with them in the direction of our future work, and feel the power of connection. When we feel connected to others, we have the power to create a powerfully dynamic and rewarding workplace.

Eleanor Hooks of the Smart Change Group is a Consulting Fellow with the Georgia Center for Nonprofits. This is excerpted from her blog; you can read the rest of it at: <http://smartchange.typepad.com/>

A leader is best
When people barely know he exists
Not so good when people know and acclaim him
Worse when they despise him
But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
They say:
We did it ourselves

A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Power by Sean Gaffney

We asked Sean for his thoughts on how power is both understood and exercised in different cultures. What is the single most important thing for the practitioner to be aware of? Does the practitioner need to “join” the client’s cultural style in order to be effective? What are some of the challenges you have encountered?

Power is not an abstraction. It is a phenomenological reality, in some cases so real that it becomes an ontological fact of life. If we, as therapists, consultants or managers, subscribe to that perspective, then this must be our starting-point. Our choices will be different, depending on the cultural setting: the more at home we are with that, the more likely we are to act congruently; the more we are strangers in a foreign land, the more awareness we need to bring to our own process. The other is never wrong in their own setting – only different to us.

A favourite anecdote amongst my colleagues at the Institute of International Business, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden concerns a French CEO of a multinational who had very recently taken up his new position in Copenhagen, Denmark. He gave his Danish secretary instructions for the week. She immediately questioned the wisdom of some of his decisions, and suggested alternatives. He was speechless. No subordinate had previously ever done anything other than carry out his orders. For the first time, he was faced with someone whose perspective on power, its validity, authority, and value was utterly different to that of his experience in France. There, a subordinate in general and a secretary in particular would not doubt the absolute correctness of a superior’s instructions – whatever they might think about them as private persons. He was now faced with an environmental other whose perspective on power did not instinctively match his own.

My own experience of this issue is partly as a Senior Lecturer in international MBA programs. A small moment illustrates: some students and I arrive at the classroom door simultaneously. Some of them reflexively hold back to let me through first; some rush to open the door for me; some rush to get through before me; some hang back and let what happens happen. Or I walk into a bar or café where students are gathered. Some immediately stand up and greet me as “Professor.” Some rush to find out what I would like to drink. Some make a small drama of leaving...two aspects of a similar perspective: to what extent does my perceived power in the classroom transfer into our social engagements?

Or this: five Chinese students who behaved in class as I had come to expect of them: the most fluent in English communicated with me, translating our exchanges for the others, and then came with follow-up questions or comments. Then, by class 3, they all went totally silent, not even communicating in class with each other. As a standard “exam”, I ask students to report on their learning from my course, as well as the aspects which supported or obstructed their learning. The spokesperson (the most fluent in English) apologised profusely for insulting me by their silence from class 3 onwards. She explained that the Chinese students were ashamed at the behaviour of another (Western) student

who insisted on addressing me in class by my first name (though I had left this option open from the start), as well as engaging me in “private” debates where he questioned almost everything I said. The Chinese students were of the opinion that I would regard the whole class as “disrespectful,” and were therefore shamed into silence.

To summarise: some students have a perspective which bestows acceptable power and authority onto me – regardless of what I may choose. Others may be paying lip-service in support of a cultural introject; others may be choosing to make a unilateral declaration of independence – in itself, possibly another cultural introject.

I have learned to accept – in the spirit of Beisser’s “Paradoxical Theory of Change” as well as Beisser’s precursors, Kierkegaard and before him, Socrates – that I must always begin where my environmental other is. This includes accepting that clients – therapeutic as well as organisational and educational – will have attributions in my direction around their perception of my power in relation to them. If they perceive me as having power – whatever that means to them – then I need to accept that I have power in relation to them.

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I also need to honestly explore what that means for me: pleasure, discomfort, certainty, uncertainty, control, confusion. Do I choose to make a power issue of this spontaneous power issue? I am particularly sensitive to the tyranny of empowering those who have no experience of being empowered and who may even doubt its validity, or find themselves in culturally

impossible and even dangerous situations as a result. There are few actions more harmful to others than imposing my principles on them. The ethnocentric imposition of one paradigm on another in the name of democracy – using power to deny the existence of power - is the ultimate paradox of our era.

Power is in the eyes of the beholder, to paraphrase the scholastic philosophers. As the co-creating other of any power relationship, I need extreme sensitivity to how I give and receive attributions of power, and my reaction to this process. I need to learn – sometimes painfully – what responses I may need to bracket, whether as therapist, consultant or manager. Learning to respond appropriately to the response of the other to me is a challenging and rich learning. Finding a way to apply power attributed to me by a client in the service of the client, as best I can judge that, is primarily my responsibility, as is my willingness to see and accept that I may have blown it, and start again.

Sean Gaffney is the author of “Gestalt with Groups: A Cross-Cultural Perspective” in Gestalt Review Vol 10, #3. Raised in Ireland, he spent six years in the UK, and has lived and practiced in Sweden since 1975. In addition to supervising and teaching at GISC and in the GISC/Gestalt OSD Center International OSD Program, Sean also consults in many different countries.



Thoughts on Women & Power cont. from Page 1

determining, ruling or governing. But from our perspective, the energy is between, and moving. Sonia and Penny say, "The energy of one person that joins the energy of another person in any experience determines the power of the experience." So power can't be separated from the context in which it shows itself.

DS: I'm newly appreciating the interactive and relational nature of power. All those girls at our house had it right! Do you think power can be conceptualized as a continuum? At one end, the power could be mostly unilateral, like guard to prisoner. In the middle the power could be more hierarchical, like boss to employee. And at the other end the power could be highly equal and relational, as in a friendship. Women are good at relational power, don't you think?

NH: That's interesting. It reminds me about the need for balance between intimate and strategic interactions that we teach is a part of any strong professional relationship. You know, we haven't talked about power as an internal dynamic as well as an interpersonal one, the way we experience power within ourselves.

DS: And that's important, because developing a sense of authority is crucial to maturity. I think power as an intrapsychic phenomenon is being grounded in oneself and in reality.

NH: And in the present – so, grounded in self, in the present and in reality.

DS: That feels totally right.

NH: In a work context a subordinate who is grounded in self has confidence and competence, can say yes or no, and probably has influence. That person wouldn't identify with the outcome of an issue and could concede without losing a sense of self.

DS: What if there's a boss who is unfair, or plays favorites, and the person needs the job?

NH: It would be important not to give personal power, or perhaps your confidence in yourself, away by buying into a crazy dynamic. Remember Sonia telling us you know you're not crazy, so if you're in a situation where everything looks crazy, look outside yourself.

DS: Yes! So what do you do when the problem is located outside yourself?

NH: It's important not to let yourself be silenced. But don't you agree that you still have to look at your own contribution to what's going on? Sometimes we bring pre-judgments about where the power sits. A difference of opinion is one thing, but if it's constant, if it's disrespect, then you've lost your power to get things done. At that point you look to see if there is support

Excerpted from "The Myth of Power," by Sonia Nevis & Penny Backman (Gestalt Review Vol 11, # 1)

...power is maintained in mutual influence, in the dynamic nuances at the boundary of the self and the environment (the other)... It is the experience between and among people, not a quality in a person...The energy of one person that joins the energy of another person in any experience determines the power of the experience, not the powerfulness of any one person... If the belief is carried forward that each person is responsible for his/her actions, then the result is that a victim is implicated and separated from the total system. However, when an experience is viewed as a field event, the picture changes. Bystanders, witnesses, medical people, friends, relatives, and others are all part of the experience, and for the experience to reach its most powerful potential for good or evil, all have to look at their part. How was support given, how was denial maintained, how was projection not challenged, how was silence condoned?

around you, inside or outside of the organization.

DS: The older I get the more I value others' support. We are all steeped in the ideal and illusion of self-sufficiency. Now I realize how much others expand my life.

NH: The flip side of this is that abusers know how important it is to isolate their victims, and deny them support or power elsewhere. External and internal support allows us to bring our power to a situation.

DS: So if we apply Gestalt principles to situations in which women feel without power...

NH: ...as always, we'd start with awareness and non-judgmental taking in of data to give time to be in the experience before acting. Both parties participate in the power, so there is never a situation in which one lacks power.

DS: That kind of awareness would allow time for conscious action. Premature action is disempowering because it's anxiety-based.

NH: So the bottom line is stop, take in the data, get support internally or from others, and act only from a grounded awareness. Be aware of prejudgments about who has or who doesn't have power and look at each participant's contribution to where it sits.

DS: Nancy, I think we're done, after all we could go on forever on this topic. We've talked about hierarchical power and relational power and the internal experience of power. I'm realizing that at the beginning when I said I felt daunted by this topic, I needed support – and I got it – from you. We enacted our topic: this has been an empowering experience.

Nancy Hardaway and Deborah Stewart teach "Women in the Working World," which will be offered again on March 14 - 16, 2008.



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