



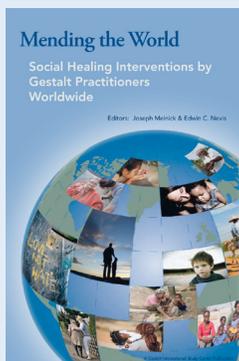
# Contact

GISC News • Issue Number 1, 2010 • www.gisc.org

## **Mending the World: Social Healing Interventions by Gestalt Practitioners Worldwide**

This new GISC book, edited by Joseph Melnick and Edwin Nevis, takes a compelling look at thirteen Gestalt change agents around the world who are working to make a difference in the social issues that exist today.

To order, call GISC or write to us at office@gisc.org. \$25.00 plus S&H



## **Announcing...**

### **GISC's Advanced Practice OD Consulting Certification**

Obtain a valuable credential  
for your study at GISC

- Professional development and recognition
- World-renowned advisors
- A supportive network
- Increased market value
- Certification demonstrating advanced training to clients and colleagues

## **With Appreciation...**

A very special thank you to all our generous donors in 2009, helping us fund 48 scholarships as well as underwriting a new initiative exploring the application of our work to public schools and colleges!

## **Gestalt at Work**

At GISC, we truly believe that we exist to make the world a better place - a place where personal transformation meets professional and organizational success; a place where professional and organizational success leads to personal and societal transformation. In this issue, we explore Gestalt at work, and the ways that Gestalt principles in practice every day lead to better understanding and more satisfying and effective workplaces. We also invite you to share our excitement as we introduce our new book, *Mending the World*, edited by Joseph Melnick and Edwin Nevis, on the work of social healing practitioners. The book offers an intensive look at the unique skills used to bring people together toward common solutions and high-impact outcomes. *Laurie Fitzpatrick, Editor*

## **The Gestalt-Informed Workplace**

A conversation with Tracy Saunders (Consultant), Michael Walsh (Consultant), and John Wipfler (CEO) - faculty in our Skills for Influential Leadership program - about how the skillful use of Gestalt leadership concepts can improve the workplace and bottom-line results. **By Laurie Fitzpatrick**

### **What are some elements of a Gestalt-informed workplace and how do you implement them?**

**Michael:** Intentionality around the impact one has. Awareness - what do people pay attention to, about themselves, about other people? In a workplace informed by Gestalt principles, there is a checking in that happens. There is also the recognition that all people can get what they need. Perhaps not always what they want, but what they need.

**John:** Some of the qualities I believe one finds in a Gestalt-informed workplace are increased awareness of self and others, a positive outlook, general sense of optimism, appreciation for different perspectives, and a better understanding of conflict and resistance and how to engage them. I believe that these sorts of elements are implemented through modeling and teaching by leadership. As a leader, I try to live from these perspectives and try to model the skills and behaviors I would like the organization and its members to embody. I also actively coach management and staff in ways that incorporate Gestalt principles.

### **Can you give me some examples?**

**John:** As projects or issues evolve, I spend a good deal of time with those involved making sure folks

"are on the same page." That is, I assume that there are multiple realities (or perspectives, interests, understandings) about any particular issue at any given time among those involved. I find that it is useful to get those perspectives to the surface as much as possible to avoid the conflicts and resistance that are sure to surface if we aren't all trying to actively account for and understand the differences. An understanding of the reasons for conflict and resistance in a system can have you work differently in order to avoid some of it.

**Michael:** Resistance is a natural expression of energy and often exists when a person is trying to protect something. In a Gestalt-informed workplace, curiosity becomes an effective means of working with resistance. If we can engage that person to understand their resistance, and bring it into the conversation, we can often move forward more effectively. I should also say that it's important for leaders to watch their own resistance, to use their awareness in that way.

**John:** When conflict and resistance do arise, then a leader needs to be aware of the dynamic, get curious, and "lean into" that resistance. The impulse is often to oppose or defend against resistance. If one takes a

**Continued on Page 2**

## Effective Negotiation: The Interplay of Strategic and Intimate Communication

by Elizabeth Morse, MA, JD

As an experienced negotiator with training and practice as a lawyer, I was inspired by the work of Edwin Nevis, PhD cofounder of GISC, and faculty members Penny Backman, MSSA and Donna Dennis, PhD, in the five-day workshop, Building Effective Professional Relationships.

In the program, we explored the premise that effective professional relationships thrive in a confluence of two fundamental types of communication – the “intimate” which emphasizes the personal connection, and the “strategic,” which focuses on goals and objectives.

Focusing on the intimate establishes connection and a sense of equality in the conversation, enhancing trust and creating “cellular” change - an opening for intuitive vision, rather than a conversation based on independent and timeless abstractions.

The role of strategic communication was all too familiar to me as negotiator, lawyer and mediator. “Reasonable minds ought not differ,” echoed law professors, judges and published case law. The concept or role of intimate communication was “not discussed.” Hence, historically, negotiation training (generally by and for lawyers) has not addressed the importance of “intimate communication” as an essential of effective negotiation.

Building Effective Professional Relationships so crystallized what I knew to be true, but had no vocabulary for – that there is no effective negotiation without the “aha” experience, the “gestalt” among the parties which that transforms, creating one-plus-one-equals-three.

I now can articulate that this transformation is dependent on the connection created through the intimate communication among the parties; that is, an appreciation and discovery of the personal experience of the parties (culture, family of origin, birth order, educational experience, etc.). The connection through intimate communication appears to diminish the influence of the ego on the process, which in my experience generally fuels fear, anger, shame, and separation, and ultimately greater conflict.

I recently discussed these thoughts regarding the role of “the intimate” (or the heart) and “the strategic” (or the mind) in effective negotiation with my friend, founder of the Negotiation Law Project at Harvard Law School and author of *Getting To Yes*. I asked him what he considered the overarching factor in his commitment and success as a “world stage” negotiator. He pondered and said, “I was the fourth of six children; I knew I wasn’t the only person to be considered, so I was always looking to find common ground.”

The Building Effective Professional Relationships program provided a well thought through and creative framework for fertile discussion and research in the emerging field of negotiation and conflict resolution.

**Elizabeth Morse, MA, JD**, founded and was managing partner of law firms in Boston, MA, and Palm Beach, FL. She has extensive experience in complex business negotiation, and has served as an advisor to leaders in business and finance, sports and entertainment. She has also served as a Federal Court-appointed mediator.

### Gestalt Workplace Continued from page 1

stance of curiosity – “what is this about” – it can go a long way toward resolution. This can be so difficult as a leader because more often than not it is the leader against whom the resistance is targeted. It is easy to take this personally if you don’t understand the dynamic – a place leaders often get into trouble.

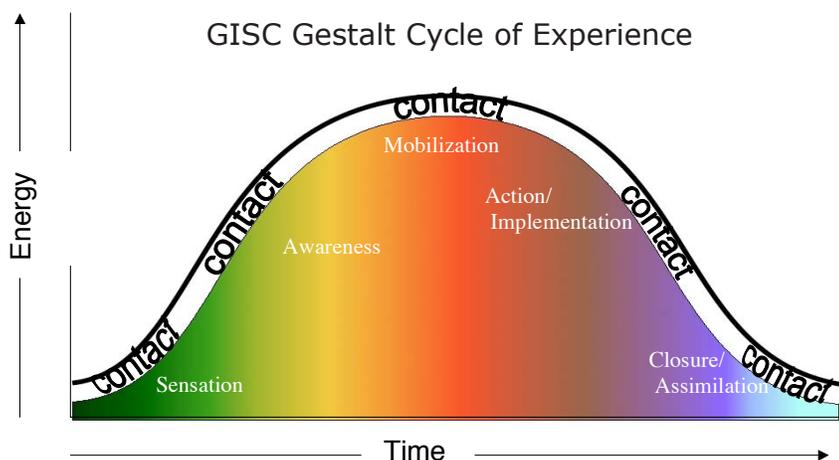
**Tracy:** The Cycle of Experience [a model which describes the phases of individual or group change] is one Gestalt concept that dramatically shifted my consultancy. I discovered that clients (and I) often jumped too quickly and often hadn’t truly understood a problem. They, with me leading the way, would grasp at solutions looking for a quick fix. The Cycle of Experience gives me a framework to slow myself and the

client down. I spend a lot more time building ground and exploring a range of possibilities (or “figures”) to discover symptoms and causes, to truly discern the “problem.” This also enables the exploration of multiple perspectives and allows us to expand the “solution space” when we take a broader, more holistic view of what’s happening.

I use the cycle to help “teach” people like myself who want to move quickly to a solution, about the importance of creating a solution that is grounded in organizational context and attends to specific individual and collective capabilities, needs and concerns. In other words, I’m trying to surface and attend to resistance and natural capability throughout the process—not just in implementation.

Understanding the Cycle of Experience has enabled not only better solutions, but a much more civilized and relational process to

**Continued on Page 4**



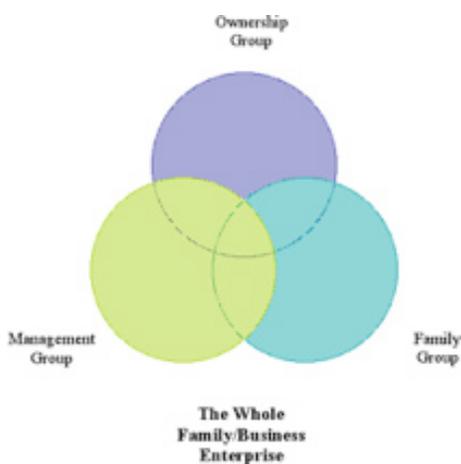
## Resolving Conflict in Family Businesses

by *Harvy Simkovits, with commentary by Edwin Nevis*

Family businesses can be more complex to manage (and intervene in as an outside practitioner) than professionally-managed firms. Not only does a “family business system” contain both ownership and management constituencies that must lead and make important decisions for the business, but they also contain family members (children, siblings, in-laws, etc.) that may have conflicting needs and expectations that can affect business and family decisions.

Common places for family-business conflict are a family-member’s career choice, remuneration/compensation, ownership/succession, and decision-making authority.

In any family business, the needs



and aspirations of these three related and overlapping subgroups (see diagram) need to be continually weighed and balanced if the whole enterprise is to serve both the business and the family well.

Some individuals in the business, like working children of the owner/founder, may straddle two subgroups (management and family). Others, like the business founder/patriarch, usually straddle all three groups—being in the center of most, if not all, ownership, management and family issues.

### Sources of Family/Business Conflict

Based on this view, sources of conflict and contention in any family-business enterprise can emerge

when:

1. Issues related to one subgroup spill over into the workings of other subgroups. For example, if two of the patriarch’s child-managers compete for their parent’s attention and good will, they may inappropriately take their sibling battles into management meetings or the ownership board-room.

2. There is inconsistent or unfair treatment of people among groups, like family members being paid more than, promoted faster than or hired over competent non-family personnel.

3. Some members of a subgroup are excluded from important conversations that affect the current or future success of that group. For example, if some uninvolved family members or in-laws are not made to understand the values, vision and condition of the business, they may have unrealistic expectations about what that business ought to provide them in terms of future financial support and career prospects.

4. Significant goal and value differences across subgroups can have lasting negative effects on the family and the business. For example, family-members who value security may want the business to not experiment with new business strategies, while others may want to take risks for potentially greater future returns. Festering conflict here can potentially tear apart both the family and the business.

5. There is avoidance of proper succession planning within one or more of the subgroups. If clear successors are not chosen and developed, then factions can rise within subgroups, and battles can ensue for control of the business.

### Moving from Conflict to Collaboration

Some effective ways to address these inherently conflicts, and to create an environment of openness, fairness and equity within and among the three family-business subgroups, are:

A. Create and maintain the right kinds of meeting forums, and dialog processes for problem-solving and decision-making for each subgroup. Family, ownership and management meetings must be made separate



Harvy Simkovits at GISC

from each other, with each forum defining or clarifying its roles and rules in the overall family-business enterprise.

B. Address the right issues in each forum. Having the wrong conversations within any subgroup can blur the boundaries of appropriateness, and create confusion and misunderstanding. For example, sibling rivalry or in-law issues should be suitably handled in a family forum, and not a business management or ownership forum.

C. Members that straddle more than one group (like family members who own shares in the business but are not involved in managing the business, or non-family managers who own part of the business, or family members who are managers yet have no ownership rights) need to learn how to effectively carry and present themselves in the various forums they participate in, while duly respecting the forums they are rightfully kept out of.

D. Educate all subgroups leaders in both conflict resolution skills (to be able to build awareness of, address, negotiate and resolve differences), and communication skills (to considerately define, articulate and work the issues that need to be handled in relevant forums).

E. Employ outside family-business coaches and advisors (financial, legal, organizational and psychological) to help members of the various groups to maintain objectivity and realism, and to work through important but delicate issues (like management and ownership succession).

### Commentary by Edwin Nevis

Harvy, a former student and colleague of mine, addresses some important Gestalt principles in his

**Continued on Page 4**

## Family Business Commentary *Continued from page 3*

suggestions for family businesses: the need for effective dialogue, appropriate framing of meeting content, recognition of multiple perspectives or realities and the balancing of intimate and strategic interactions. These skills that we teach at GISC leader and practitioner programs, help consultants and family members see the complexity of the situation, where intimate considerations and strategic considerations require a fine balance.

While openness, fairness, and equity are important, family members need coaching in learning how to know in which meeting it is appropriate to discuss a particular matter and in learning how to listen to each other and respond differently. The Gestalt approach teaches you how to be more respectful of differences and how to minimize conflict through appreciation of multiple viewpoints and personalities.

Families in business can bring with them great personal and marketplace advantages (like higher family and non-family loyalty and trust; closer relationships to customers, vendors and employees; and the pleasure of life-long relationships).

Facilitating these different conversations through specific micro-interventions based on what the participants are doing well, along with feedback on what they need to develop, is the basis of our CCTP training, of which I am proud to say I am a recent graduate!

**Harvy Simkovits, CMC**, works with closely-held, owner-managed companies that want to be their best and succeed more in business. Harvy comes from a family business background, and has been trained in general management, Gestalt theory, organization development, and executive coaching. Harvy is also a prolific writer and has taught in Boston College's MBA Program on "The Success and Survival of the Independent Business."

**Edwin Nevis, PhD**, is the Co-founder of the Gestalt International Study Center and serves on the faculty and board of directors.

## Gestalt Workplace *Continued from page 2*

discovering those solutions; and that, in turn, builds stronger personal, interpersonal and organizational relationships along with much more sustainable solutions.

### Do Gestalt principles create a different working environment?

**Michael:** I believe that Gestalt-informed environments tolerate differences. There is more curiosity and less need for conformance. If one looks at Gestalt communities, one often finds wide perspectives, greater gender balance and minorities. Widening that spectrum gives an organization access to people it wouldn't otherwise have access to. The organization is enhanced when it includes and values people who might otherwise find themselves marginalized. Marginalized people don't feel excited and engaged.

**Tracy:** If a "safe container" can be offered to allow for vulnerability, discussions beyond KPIs are possible. We can discuss what matters most and people's personal feelings about the issues or challenges and how to move forward. Through this process, the leaders themselves are changed. Unless there is sensitivity to the vulnerability of running an organization and the pressure to deliver results, organizational environments won't foster creativity. Without creativity, we can be stuck in mechanistic processes. When leaders are dynamic and connected personally, people know that they matter. When homage is paid to "what" needs to get done and the "how" things are done, balancing the needs of all stakeholders, much more sustainable results are possible.

### Does that affect the organization's bottom line?

**Tracy:** Yes absolutely. I don't have the "formula" to calculate the ROI but certainly organizations can be more effective. We are talking about how to measure missed opportunity – the missed conversations, the ideas. These can come when a balance of both strategic and intimate conversations take place. By nature, organizations are designed to be strategic, but at the end of the day, organizations are about people. In our short-term, results-oriented,

too-many-tasks-not-enough-time organizational cultures, it's easy to forget this.

**Michael:** I believe that if there is intentionality around awareness, people are more efficient. With awareness and intent, more attention is paid to people than to things. My personal experience and that of my clients is that when people feel more connected, they find their work more satisfying.

**John:** My experience is that it works. We have a very low turnover rate, people want to come to work, they trust leadership and the process, they take risks and are willing to be actively engaged, and they are happy to be part of the organization. It has a direct impact on creating a healthier organizational culture, resulting in higher productivity and happy staff. Gestalt leadership skills are a very solid return on investment.

**Tracy Saunders, MA** is a management consultant in private practice (*Intruequest*), specializing in how organizations function. She's involved in strategic organizational change, team development, executive coaching and leadership development.

**Michael Walsh, MBA**, is a partner in a ten-person international consulting firm based in Ottawa, Canada. He has studied with GISC for more than ten years.

**John Wipfler, JD, MBA**, is a healthcare CEO with twenty years of healthcare management, legal and regulatory experience. He has held leadership positions in both work and civic activities.

## Coming Up at GISC

April 26 - 28

Skills for  
Influential Leadership:  
An Overview

May 13 - 20

Cape Cod Training Program  
Week One

May 20 - 23

Life Strategies: Navigating  
Personal & Professional Transitions

June 22 - 24

Annual Leadership Conference:  
Developing Organizational Cultures  
of Creative Candor