

Stressing Well: A Transformational Spin of the Wellness Wheel

One, two, three, one, two, three....
My fellow workshop participants counted off in preparation for our first small group exercise. As the counting reached me, Michael, our workshop leader interrupted: “No, you’re not included.”



I felt as though a rug had been pulled out from beneath my feet. I struggled to control my emotions, my face betraying a mixture of confusion, disbelief, and disappointment, mingled with a vague sense of betrayal.

During planning for the workshop (ironically, the theme was “loss”), my fellow co-organizers had repeatedly assured me that I could be a full participant throughout the workshop itself. While small group exercises were normally done in triads, their experience had been that an occasional group of four was formed if the overall group size was not divisible by three. However, on that particular morning, Michael appeared unwilling to make an accommodation.

As the triads began their work together, I attempted to regain my equilibrium. I began a stresswell™ spin of the wheel¹ while I tapped into my usual repertoire of stress management skills. I stopped to breathe and shift into coherence.² I acknowledged my feelings and released them.³ I examined my beliefs and judgments about the incident.⁴



Although one of the groups had invited me in as an observer, I found myself continually distracted by feelings of loss and abandonment. I felt fidgety and unable to sit still in a spirit of presence within the small group. Eventually, I was pulled away from the exercise by an administrative task, and decided it would be too disruptive for me to return.

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I left the room for a few moments to wash my face and provide some distance from the workshop itself. As the exercise ended, lunch arrived and I realized how hungry I felt.

Conversation during lunch was also awkward. My fellow organizers shared my puzzlement and empathized with my sadness. Yet, I was also aware of wanting to maintain a positive atmosphere for the rest of the participants—even though I still was unsure of my own status for the remainder of the workshop.

A gnawing sadness continued throughout lunch. Tears lingered just beneath the surface and threatened to erupt without notice. I was puzzled by how important it seemed to be for me to actually participate in the workshop.

Finally, lunch was finished, and the group came back together. I learned that Michael had decided to let me participate in the rest of the workshop exercises. That afternoon, we would be take turns telling a story about a loss in our own lives.

I paused for a moment to invite a “felt sense”⁵ of which story might want to be told that afternoon. Ah, along came my sophomore homeroom and English teacher, a nun whose name I could no longer remember. What I did recall, however, was that “Sr. Mary NoName” and I had become fast friends that fall. She was perhaps no more than ten years my senior. I had found myself enjoying our conversations immensely and looked forward to the times we spent together.

Then, one day, she had stopped me as I was leaving homeroom and told me that we could no longer spend time together outside of class. She had offered no explanation as I sensed a door in my heart slam shut. From that day forward, I was invisible to her and I felt shunned.



That afternoon, however, as I told the story to my “listener” within our group of four, I began to see threads linking that long ago experience with the intense feelings that had haunted me just a few hours before. I began to recognize that those threads were linked as well to other losses throughout my life that had included themes of exclusion and abandonment and which had never quite lost their emotional sting.

As part of the workshop exercise, we also had the opportunity to address our listener with whatever words we would wish to say directly to the person we had been telling the story about, as well as offer a blessing to that person. I found myself speaking both to myself as the devastated 15 year old girl and to my beloved teacher, acknowledging the pain she

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must have felt as well (because I felt sure that the forced separation had not been her choice).

As I spoke, I felt as though I were laying down a heavy burden, that I had carried for so long. And throughout the rest of the workshop, I could feel the healing continue.

Of course, old habits sometimes are reluctant to slip away quite so easily. As a result, in the days following the workshop, I've noticed occasional twinges of old, familiar, well-rehearsed feelings of abandonment. Yet, as quickly as the twinges appear, they now disappear with the recognition that the initial hurt has been healed and that I no longer need the protective shield.

Lessons learned? First, that any experience can affect us deeply within all dimensions of our being. Second, that a lingering response to a stressful incident might have deep taproots to an earlier experience that yearns for a transformational healing process. Third, that a "spin of the wheel" may become a three-dimensional spiral of growth and healing that transcends time and space.

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¹ To download a copy of the "spin of the wheel" exercise, go to <http://www.snipurl.com/7umaa>

² To download a copy of [HeartMath](#)'s "Quick Coherence" exercise, go to <http://www.snipurl.com/7uq07>

³ To download a sample [Sedona Method](#) exercise, go to <http://www.snipurl.com/7uvtn>

⁴ To download a sample exercise, go to <http://www.snipurl.com/7ymq9>

⁵ For more information about "felt sense", go to <http://www.snipurl.com/7you6>

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