



Personal Development

The personal development of the facilitator plays a big role in the application of the Worldwork paradigm. What does it mean to be developed, and how does a developed person compare to an undeveloped person? No one can answer that question, in my view. For a social activist, personal development has to do with a sense of awareness about rank and privilege, and compassion for those on the margin. For someone who is leading a large mainstream organization, personal development might be associated with the ability to make hard decisions that help an organization to stay competitive and survive. What is personal development for one is regression for another.

I have been privileged to participate in and co-facilitate a gathering of Aboriginal Communities in Australia. I remember during one of these occasions some years ago, we were getting ready to start a gathering which was meant to last for about three to four days. I and two Australian friends were the only white folks in the group. It took place in Brisbane, and we were expecting Aboriginals who lived within the Brisbane aboriginal urban community, as well as people who lived up North in more rural areas, or more tribal situations. Some of the men that were elders in their respective communities agreed that they should make an opening ceremony before we began the meeting, which included the burning of some eucalyptus leaves. A group consisting of urban and tribal Aboriginals set out to look for a suitable tree, and took me along for the ride. While we were driving through Musgrave Park, a green area in Brisbane where the Aboriginal center was located, and where we held the meetings, we saw a group of Aboriginal men sitting on the park ground, drinking beer. “You see this”, said one of the elders of the Brisbane community to me, “this is what oppression has done to us. There they sit, our brothers, drinking beer at 9 in the morning. It’s a serious problem. They need help.” Continuing with a general discussion about oppression, we went on with our search.



We did find the tree, cut some branches, and drove back. As we got out of the car, an elder from one of the tribal communities up North who had remained mostly quiet throughout the discussion, turned to me and said confidentially, obviously not wanting to openly disrespect his urban peer: “Don’t take this statement at face value. I thought these guys in the park were fine. Although they drank beer, they were sitting on the earth, and were therefore connected to the biggest power source in life – they are well taken care of. Our friend here, however, sits on a chair all day. Now that is a real problem, that far exceeds the consumption of alcohol. It’s him and his attitudes that need help.” This incident stayed with me for a long time. Although I had had many close contacts and friendships with Australian Aboriginals since my first visit in Australia nearly 20 years ago, this incident drove me to make more connections, and to travel up North to find out more about the attitude that was behind this words. For us Europeans, European Americans, and European Australians, personal development is frequently associated with a Christian principle of purity, being a “good” person. David, the Aboriginal tribal man who made that significant statement to me, taught me that personal development can be measured by our connection to nature and the earth, a non-judgmental source of nourishment and support. I have learned a lot from this viewpoint, including many valuable lessons for a more harmonious life-work balance. I learned over the years the lesson within that principle: if a sense of joy is not present in what we do, it’s not worth doing it. Interestingly enough, that attitude itself works as a prevention against addictions. Although they are on opposite poles in terms of their moral teachings, both models of personal development are united in their wish for more happiness for the individual. Both views, the one that sees personal development as an effort to overcome addictions in the face of racial oppression, and the one that sees development as the conscious or unconscious attempt to hold onto traditional values, make sense from this larger perspective. During that meeting, this theme kept us busy as a community for the four days that we worked together. Personal development and the various conflicts around it



are expressions of the overall tendencies that exist in groups, and the unique emerging dialogues about what it means to lead a happy life. From this viewpoint, how can we frame personal development for the Worldworker? I like to think that one of the important aspects is the very fact that we have a concept of personal development, and are able to understand our own problems and learnings within a framework that allows us to see ourselves as emerging spirits or developing people. When we work with groups and organizations, the collective invariably becomes our teacher. Our best moral intentions clash with the best moral intentions of another group. What we consider development, another group considers a standstill. Within this context, personal development means opening up to this diversity, and understanding all of our problems with other people or subgroups as areas in which we need to grow and learn about others. How we do this is up to each one of us. We each have our own way of learning and growing, and need to be respected and supported in that way. Please look under exercises to see some examples of how we can use our own problems as leaders, participants and facilitators of organizations to grow as individuals.