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Focus On: Patterns of Success

With the news so full of systemic failure, this issue of the newsletter is devoted to patterns that are more positive – exploring what they are, why they are valuable to us, and how one learns to see them and teach them. **Jackie Sherman** talks about her observations as a faculty member in the "Cape Cod Model for Organizations" and how that got her interested in exploring how to teach patterns to her students. **Stuart Simon** and **Sharona Halpern** share their thoughts on a model they have developed for their workshop "Difficult Topics and Successful Conversations" that helps couples, or anyone stuck in unsuccessful conversation patterns, to become more competent at managing difficult topics. **Nancy Hardaway** and I add some additional reflections on how we think about patterns in our work and lives. These articles raise awareness about practices that have long been embedded in the most powerful Gestalt interventions and we hope they will encourage you to think more about the patterns you see.

Trish Perry, Guest Editor

Learning to See Group Patterns by Jackie Sherman, in conversation with Trish Perry

I asked Jackie to talk about patterns – what got her interested, how she has been thinking about teaching them, and what about the ability to see patterns is valuable from her point of view.

First of all, seeing patterns seems to be how my brain works. I see them everywhere! I think some people are really wired to see patterns and some less so. As an intervener steeped in the Cape Cod Model (CCM), I was trained to observe for behaviors (patterns) that show up repeatedly. When we teach the CCM we suggest that you sit back and observe a group, couple or family, looking first for what is well developed. We say, "When you see something three times, it's probably a pattern."

As faculty in **Applying the Cape Cod Model in Organizations**, I watched people struggle with seeing patterns (any pattern) in a group and sharing back their observations. Having been trained first as an economist, I learned to look for what jumped out in the context of numbers or in economic behaviors. That is one of the lenses I have on the world. As therapists, leaders, or organization consultants our lenses help us see different patterns – relationship and communication patterns that exist in interactions in, between or among people. Some people come to CCM with eyes that are already finely tuned to

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Difficult Topics, Successful Conversations

An interview with Stuart Simon and Sharona Halpern by Trish Perry

GISC: How does the idea of "patterns" fit with your workshop on "Difficult Topics and Successful Conversations?"

SS: Part of what got us interested in running the workshop was our experience that many couples have learned to avoid talking about certain topics because the conversations go so poorly. We thought that perhaps if we imposed a structure, in essence, gave them a pattern, it might lead to more successful conversations.

SH: We knew that many couples attempt conversations about difficult topics and the pattern was that they would leave the conversations feeling unsuccessful and bad. Then of course that leads to avoiding that topic. We wanted to create a new way of talking, a new pattern, that would be more successful.

SS: They had given up...they felt unsatisfied, or worse, completely demoralized.

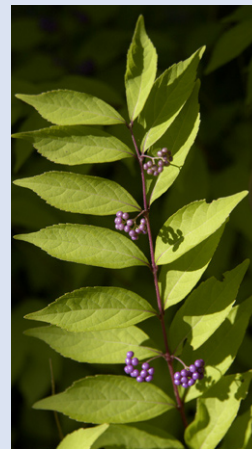
GISC: Were there any particular conversations that were always difficult or did it vary from couple to couple?

SH: Actually, we structured the workshop in such a way that we never really knew the content of any couple's conversation. The focus was not on the topics, rather it was on teaching a new structure, a new pattern to try. When couples practiced, they practiced privately.

GISC: What was the new structure?

SS: One of the things we decided was that the couples needed to have a "contracting period". As we all know, the most dreaded words for couples are: "We need to talk!" In the contracting process, there has to be genuine agreement between both members of the couple about time, place, content, and length of the conversation. And for some couples, that alone was worth the workshop.

SH: Another thing we considered is that couples shy away from difficult topics since the conversations often become emotional. The new pattern we taught them was designed to slow the conversation down. Each partner makes one statement of their experience...a thought, a feeling, etc. And then, the critical piece was that they had to ask a question of their partner. That could be simply: "Do you understand what I'm saying?" or "What impact does that have on you? The important



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Coming Up at GISC:

November 2 - 7
**Applying the Cape Cod Model
 in Organizations**

November 8 - 12
**Building Effective
 Professional Relationships**

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Photography by Laurie Fitzpatrick

“Who Gave You Your Eyes?”

by Trish Perry

Over the last year at GISC, I began to hear more talk about patterns, and at one point was asked how I had learned to see them. Right about the time I was asked that question, a friend was talking about an article she had just read where an artist asked: “Who Gave You Your Eyes?” The two questions seemed to me to be tightly interwoven.

When I think of the eyes that see patterns and figures emerging in and between people, I begin with the eyes of my childhood, eyes that watched and watched to see what the grown-ups were doing, how other kids interacted, what made friends into strangers and strangers into friends. Early on, some of it was to see patterns in my family that signaled availability or unavailability, anger or depression, presence or absence, alliances or disconnections. These patterns were often nonverbal, subtle, specific to certain individuals. A wrinkle deepening, a mouth tightening, a tired smile, a skirt smoothed, a look passed back and forth. This early training was a crash course in “noticing,” that I think I have carried with me throughout my life. Do all kids do this? I don’t know. Maybe. At any rate, I became an observer, initially with no other purpose than figuring out what was going on, even long past any real need to do so.

When I began my training as a psychologist (in a psychodynamic tradition), I found that this tendency came in handy when working with clients. In good student fashion, I learned, somewhat reluctantly, to put the appropriate label on the groupings of feelings and behaviors that I saw, depending on what I was being taught. “Borderline, narcissist, oppositional personality disorder.”

Then I did the OSD Gestalt training ten years ago and began to learn something new about patterns. A lot of that learning came from observation, watching masterful interveners name what they were seeing, tracking a series of comments that had hopped around a group, seemingly unrelated, and, in the pointing out of them, creating the space in which the participants could do their own meaning making. Sometimes I had seen the same thing, sometimes I hadn’t. I discovered that

my seeing was acute, but not always *that* acute! I opened my eyes a little bit more.

That was one thing they did. The other was to come up with an image or metaphor that occurred to them that captured some essence of a series of behaviors. It wasn’t an interpretation, per se, but it was a figure. Something else one could do with a pattern.

They also gave me a framework that could hold this concept of emerging figures: The Cycle of Experience. With it, I could pay more attention to my own awareness and the figures that I created, sometimes based on old, old stories. The faculty encouraged me to think about the speed with which I made associations and slow down enough to check my data, look for new data, and give different names or images to the figures I saw. They suggested that I experiment with testing these figures. The concept of “contact” offered a way of assessing when a pattern raised into awareness for a group goes to its heart.

When I think about “contact” and the naming of patterns, I remember a day when my Gestalt peer group worked with Sonia Nevis to learn more about what was going on for us and how we had gotten stuck. We offered to do a self-assessment ahead of time, but she gently suggested we just show up and do what we normally do. Within the first ten minutes she made an observation: “What I’m noticing is that everyone wants to lead and nobody wants to follow.” Indeed!

To return to the initial question about how I learned to identify patterns/figures in interactions, I would say that my history set the stage in a particular way, and the teachers I have encountered at Gestalt gave me new eyes.

Trish Perry, PsyD, is a facilitator and consultant working with individuals, groups, and communities. She has worked exclusively with non-profit and governmental organizations, particularly in education and healthcare. In recent years, she has become increasingly interested in dialogue and community-wide civic engagement processes. Trish is a coach and faculty member of the Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development program.

Difficult Topics, Successful Conversations

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part here, is that they had to consider the impact of their statement on their partner. They had to account for them.

The partner responds by doing the same thing. This process of statement and question continues until they have a full understanding of both people's concerns. It turns out that imposing this structure was an important tool for managing or containing the emotions.

SS: The most critical part of the model is asking the question after making a statement. Often we're so committed to saying our piece that we don't find out how it's being heard by the other person. At the same time, when we are invited to say what the impact is on us, it keeps things from spiraling out of control.

GISC: Did you coach the couples on how to ask questions?

SS: We call our imposed structure, The Arc of a Conversation, which actually coincides with the Gestalt Cycle of Experience (although we didn't use any of those



Stuart Simon with CCTP participant, Fall '08

terms). We start with "Building Awareness" by using the structure of statements and questions. This helps channel the energy into awareness rather than emotion. We taught them to ask "real questions" -- questions where you don't already know what the answer is; questions that express genuine interest in the other person; and questions where you are willing to hear the answer.

What we found is that when people believe they are going to be asked about their experience, they slow down and are more able to listen.

GISC: What strikes me is how practical this model is. It instantly makes sense.

SH: Yes! The participants kept saying it should be a refrigerator magnet so they could keep referring to it!

SS: Our original fear was that if we had too much structure, it would take away from the conversation, but we found that wasn't true.

SH: In fact, in the beginning when we did a demonstration, some people were concerned that it would feel too awkward, that it was stilted and lifeless. However even those who resisted it most, found that it was incredibly helpful.

GISC: Can you say a little more about the Cycle?

SS: We didn't use Gestalt terms. In describing The Arc of a Conversation, we talked about starting with contracting; then focusing on building awareness with the aim of creating "fullest joint awareness" (similar to contact in the Cycle); then a "let's try" step (action) where couples experiment with something new, a new solution. We completed The Arc with "making meaning" where they talk about what they learned and managed any disappointments.

SH: Our intent was to keep the couples focused on building awareness before going to "Let's Try."

GISC: One thing that struck me was including a place for the expression of disappointment. It made me think of Sonia Nevis talking about the ability to "bear disappointing and being disappointed" as essential in relationships.

SS: The fact is that there are differences between people and managing differences well doesn't guarantee that the outcome will be just what each person wants. We are trying for something that is "OK enough".

GISC: Where did your ideas and theories come from?

SS: Sharona and I are both strongly influenced by Gestalt principles, and of course by Sonia.

SH: They have also grown out of our work with clients and our own intimate

relationships.

SS: I also find that the application in the work place is similar. When I work with organizations, I see the same patterns of unsuccessful conversations. People start avoiding certain topics, which really interferes with work getting done.

GISC: Anything else?

SS: One of the participants said that given all these things you learn to do in your life -- driving a car, shaving, math, balancing a checkbook -- that are hard at first but then become routine, it's too bad that nobody ever taught us how to have a difficult conversation!

SH: It's about competency. People usually move into intimate relationships knowing what they don't want to do, but less often have an image of what they do want to do. The excitement and energy that the participants had at the end of the workshop was huge. They felt competent.

SS: One final thought: In the workshop the need for coaching was minimal. We'd listen to a couple talk and then say: "Do you know you made a statement? Now ask a question." That was the new thing, just asking a question. The participants were surprised how differently their conversations went when they just asked a question!

Stuart Simon, LICSW, is a Gestalt practitioner with over 30 years experience as a therapist, consultant, trainer, and coach. He is a partner at Management Support Services, Inc., an international management training and consulting firm, and a member of the core faculty of GISC's Cape Cod Training Program.

Sharona Halpern, MA, LMHC, is a practicing couples and family therapist with over 25 years experience. For many years she has led groups for couples in the Boston area addressing interfaith relationships, parenting, and relationship building.



Learning to See Patterns

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see these types of patterns; for some it is something new to learn.

Observing this challenge, I began to wonder how to help participants learn what to look for. Tunde Horvath (who was shadow-faculty in the Cape Cod Training Program), observed something similar during CCTP. During the past year my thinking has evolved as a result of talking with her. When we spoke with other faculty members about this, I heard a distinction that has become important to me ... the difference between looking "for" something, vs. just seeing what is there. There is understandable reluctance to give people a formula or a set of things to look for. Thinking about my own learning related to seeing and being able to describe patterns in groups, I know that the more understanding or experience I have with what patterns might be there, or what they might look like, the more I am able to actually see different behavior patterns in a group. We don't all have the same "command over distinctions".

There seem to be two big factors that affect how easily we can see patterns: how we're wired, and our knowledge of working with / experience observing groups/ couples/families. There's nothing we can do about how someone is wired. But I do think we can support people to learn to see different patterns in groups and also to learn how to describe what they are seeing or experiencing. And I believe that hearing what others are seeing can expand our awareness of what sorts of things we can observe. (A perfect example for me is when I learned the Cycle of Experience – at first it was pretty foreign to me ... I was taught to see the Cycle, and over time it has become a part of me...in such a way that now I almost can't "not see it".)

There are really two different steps for the therapist / consultant: 1. seeing a pattern; and 2. naming or describing it in a way that can be useful to the client. We can and need to teach both. But let me stay

focused on seeing patterns.

"There are so many different ways to see patterns." Some people naturally focus on energy patterns, where it is in a group, how it rises and falls, who generates it, what lessens it, while other interveners focus on sound patterns (volume, quickness of speech), influence patterns, relational patterns (who "feeds" and who receives, who moves close and who pulls away, when this happens), the balance between intimate and strategic patterns of interaction, patterns related to hierarchy, and many more. Since there are so many different kinds of patterns to "see" (hear/feel), I believe that learning about what other interveners see can increase my own ability to observe – actually it HAS for me.

There are several other lenses that can be used for seeing or recognizing patterns. One involves looking at resistances – what we might call the patterns of interruption to contact. For example, if I were to think about "deflection", one of the patterns I might see in a system that embodies deflection would be that a person says something to someone and that person doesn't respond to what he's heard but changes the subject. Or another group member interjects a different idea and the group follows. What I'm seeing is a system that may be well developed at moving through topics, but is less well developed at staying with one topic long enough to explore it in depth. Whether the pattern serves them well depends on what they are trying to accomplish.

Another lens is the Cycle of Experience. In businesses, it's not unusual to see a team that is very well developed at moving from data to action, spending little time in awareness. That's a pattern that jumps out to me really quickly. The opposite often is true in non-profit organizations, where they have a great ability to build awareness and are less developed at moving to action. Keeping the Cycle in the background and paying attention to how the group works in relation to the Cycle, helps me see some of its patterns.

In talking about this and thinking about the value of teaching patterns, it seems clear that sharing the patterns we observe is a way of raising awareness, which supports change. It is a way of revealing the system to itself, of giving it data about what happens in the system over and over and the potential impact of those repetitions. It is a way to support the system by increasing the choices it has to produce the results that are important to it.

As for where this interest is heading, the faculty is talking about how we think about patterns, how we "see" them, and how we might teach them. The critical point is finding ways that do not impose a particular set of patterns, but rather increase the range of possibilities of what students can see. I'd love to see us have an opportunity to work with videos, where all the students in a class could observe a group interacting and identify all the patterns that they see – the benefit of a video is that we can replay it, giving us an opportunity to really "see what you saw" and thus increasing our ability to see more different types of patterns. At the same time, I want to continue experimenting with ways to use our workshop practice sessions to maximize the opportunities for students. This means both encouraging them to look for the patterns that jump out at them as well as having a chance to see the many different kinds of patterns that other practitioners might observe. Of course it's also helpful to hear how others describe the same pattern that I saw...but that's for another article.

Something that excites me about GISC is that we are always redesigning the workshops with the goal of finding more effective ways to teach. And of course by teaching, I expand my learning.

*Jacqueline Sherman, PhD, is an organizational consultant with twenty years experience partnering with leaders in business, nonprofit, and government organizations to make effective change. She teaches **Applying the Cape Cod Model in Organizations** at G.I.S.C.*



Gestalt International Study Center is a diverse worldwide learning community based on trust, optimism and generosity. We study and teach skills that energize human interaction and lead to action, change and growth, and we create powerful learning experiences for individuals and organizations. We offer leadership development, advanced professional training and programs for personal development for executives, coaches, consultants and clinicians. Join us!

Repeatable Patterns of Success – A Fish Tale:

Leader's Blog

by Nancy Hardaway

With all the failures making headlines in the news, I've closed my newspaper to focus on success. I just finished *When Fish Fly* by John Yokoyama and Joseph Michelli, Ph.D. which tells John's fascinating story of how his tiny fish stand in Seattle became a business famous throughout the world. He owns the World Famous Seattle Pike Place Fish Market. The way he tells it, it all started with his own attendance at a personal development seminar he attended to meet a girl.

He didn't get the girl, but what he found was a clearer vision of himself and his role. In the book he describes his own development journey and how it was the foundation of becoming the leader of a world famous organization that has made a significant difference in their community and in the world of business by modeling new patterns of working, of developing people, of creating environments for staff and customers to connect honestly and have fun together.

The story reminded me of Nick's Pizza, the fourth largest independent pizza company in the country that I wrote about visiting in one of my columns last spring. Nick and his leaders have studied with us and he built his company culture around Gestalt principles. He is finding success and satisfaction and community impact that parallels the Fish story. I get excited to think we provide a path to this level of personal development and authentic leadership. We don't have to be born with it, we can learn it!

When I was a senior executive in financial services I used a trainer who brought the training video that featured the Fish Market to teach elements of business success and customer delight. That was before I studied at GISC. It was fun to watch, it looked and sounded good, but I didn't see the structure underneath – the repeatable patterns that supported what they were able to do. That's what John Yokoyama reveals in his book.

Those patterns are what I've internalized over the years of study at GISC – how to read group behavior, almost like an EKG, how to connect and build effective relationships, the optimistic stance that allows me to see opportunity and potential, how to have conversations on difficult topics without delay or dread, how to be curious and aware and attend to what is said and what is not said, and how to use myself effectively by staying truer to myself.

With new staff coming on in July to train, new faculty being developed, new students attending GISC, and new board members, I've been intentional about modeling the leadership patterns we teach. It was easy during the summer when the Center was quiet but as September rolled around when we have classes back to back, and everyone needs something, and the financial market news built fear, the chaos made it harder to be intentional. The urgent took precedence and I reflected that back to the folks around me.

Because the patterns are there, in me and in the organization, it was easier to get back on track. As John highlights in his book, success is an ongoing process. I refocused on those patterns that support my success as a leader and felt more grounded.

What are we doing? We're paying attention to the daily successes, little or big, which is building our enthusiasm and energy. We're looking at what is working and turning disappointments into opportunities by taking an optimistic look and getting creative. We're turning registrations around and finding exciting momentum in new ways. We're focusing on why our work matters and enjoying the growth of the students and the energy they leave with. We may not be throwing fish (read the book) or dropping peanuts on the floor (visit Nick's Pizza in Chicago) but we are having fun, working with energy and creating success.

Nancy Hardaway is President and CEO of GISC and is a faculty member of **Women, Work, and Leadership** and **Skills for Influential Leadership**.

What's Happening at GISC

New Staff

Laurie Fitzpatrick

Manager of Operations & Programs

Laurie brings us a wealth of creativity, business, and people skills from her experience as a professional photographer, founder of a tuna export business, and public relations manager, as well as a passion for writing and lifelong learning.

Yolanda de Celis and Linda Hladek
Program Assistants

Yolanda has a business and clinical management background and started at GISC as a student, prior to her new role here. She shares responsibilities for supporting our students and faculty with Linda, who comes to us with a background in developing computer education in local school systems.

Exciting New Certification

Through the work of Master Coach and GISC Board member, Mary Anne Walk, we've received approval from the International Coach Federation to offer Continuing Education credits for six programs:

- Cape Cod Training Program
- Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches
- Applying the Cape Cod Model to Coaching
- Applying the Cape Cod Model to Organizations, November 2-7, 2008
- Facilitating Leadership Transitions
- Building Effective Professional Relationships, November 8-12, 2008

2009 Catalogue Now Available



G.I.S.C Program Calendar • 2008 - 2009

2008:

October 25	Introduction to the Cape Cod Model (one-day intensive)
October 27-30	Graduate Leadership Forum
November 2 - 7	Applying the Cape Cod Model in Organizations
November 8 - 9	Couples Workshop: Difficult Topics, Successful Conversations
November 8 - 12	Building Effective Professional Relationships
November 17 - 19	Skills for Influential Leadership

2009:

January 3 – 4	Working on Your Work (PA)
January 12 – 15	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session One
February 10 – 12	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Two
March 5 – 10	Applying the Cape Cod Model to Coaching
March 16 – 28	Gestalt European Conferences (Hungary)
March 17 – 19	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Three
March 20 – 22	Women, Work, and Leadership
March 29 – April 3	Leadership in the 21st Century, 2008-09 Week Two
April 20 – 22	Skills for Influential Leadership: An Overview
April 28 – 30	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Four
May 1 – 3	In It Together: Partners Facing, Managing and Welcoming Change
May 14 – 21	Cape Cod Training Program, Week One
May 17 – 23	International Organization & Systems Development, Week One
May 28 – 31	Organizational Conference - Leadership Succession
May 31 – June 3	Leading Nonprofit Organizations
June 4 – 5	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Five
June 11 – 13	Working on Your Work
June 23 – 27	Executive Personality Dynamics for Coaches
July 26 – 28	Working with the Body in Mind
July 30 – August 1	The Building Blocks of Creativity
August 27 – 30	Next Phase: Navigating Personal & Professional Transitions
September 10 – 11	Wrestling with Ethical Dilemmas
September 12	Psychopharmacology
September 13 - 14	Introduction to the Cape Cod Model of Change
September 16 – 18	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Six
September 20 – 25	Leadership in the 21st Century, Week One
October 1 – 8	Cape Cod Training Program, Week Two
October 9 – 12	Consulting Excellence: Finding Your Developmental Edge
October 13 – 14	Cape & Islands Nonprofit Leadership Development, Session Seven
October 15 – 17	Skills for Influential Leadership: An Overview
October 21 – 24	Facilitating Leadership Transitions
October 26 – 29	Graduate Leadership Forum
November 7 - 11	Building Effective Professional Relationships
November 13 – 15	Conference: Consulting to Family Businesses
November 16 – 22	Applying the Cape Cod Model in Organizations
December 3 – 6	Writers' Workshop