EDITORIAL

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The Selling of Gestalt

In today’s world of therapy and organizational consultation, there is a high degree of competition. To heighten the world’s exposure to Gestalt, we must continue to expand our market share and learn new ways to share our wonderful model. I know of no other approach that so seamlessly combines an ability to conceptualize process with powerful techniques for intervention. But we face certain challenges in promoting Gestalt therapy and consultation, both in the United State and abroad.

I have spoken of some of these challenges in other editorials and writings (Melnick, 1997; Melnick, in press). We need to write more. We need to conduct more research. We need to be less insular.

Those things, to some degree, have been happening over the past several years. Many of us have published papers and books on Gestalt theory. Nonetheless, although we are writing more, we need to offer our books through mainstream publishers. Although we are doing more research, we need to submit our research to mainstream journals. Although we are traveling to an increasing number of Gestalt conferences, both national and international, we also need to attend non-Gestalt conferences. And although we are well established at a small number of academic institutions, we must have an impact at more of them.

Furthermore, although we eschew conformity and tend to resist what is in style, we must recognize that “evidenced based treatment, empirically supported ther-

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apy, cognitive focus, psychological and organizational assessment and evaluation, etc.” are the critical elements of today’s competitive landscape. We must be able to discuss our method using these frames and concepts.

To sustain interest in our approach, to grow, and to flourish, we must find new ways to stay relevant. In short, we need to promote both our theory and ourselves as practitioners, together and as individuals. We need to be continually selling.

I am aware that just the concept of selling creates resistance in many of us, for the process can easily be seen as being diametrically opposed to our basic values—as a form of manipulation that circumvents awareness. The word selling, itself, conjures up images of charlatans and crooks: used car salesman conning their victims.

We have to get over our resistance to selling and accept the fact that we are one of many players in the marketplace of change. I believe that we can package our theories in digestible forms and present ourselves as an accessible practice that creates change better than other approaches without losing our uniqueness.

Our Current Issue

Because of the urgency of this issue, I am pleased to present Bill Palmer’s “Sales and Gestalt” along with commentaries by Daniel Saint and Jonno Hanafin. Palmer’s article is, at its core, an essay on influence. While focusing on buyer-seller interaction, he helps us confront our “distaste, dislike, and disregard for the work of selling….”

Saint, in his Commentary, points out that we are not alone; many professionals are averse to or, at a minimum, ambivalent toward selling. He discusses that this resistance to selling seems to be in part an outcome of our professional training. We believe that if we produce a high-quality product, people will buy it automatically. To sell, promote, and advertise is unprofessional. Saint does an excellent job of deconstructing that concept. He asks whether selling generates less resistance if it is redefined as “growing the business” or “practice development,” and the sales professional is seen as one who “enables clients to buy services they need?”

Hanafin, rather than looking at our resistance to selling, instead focuses on what and how we sell. To say it simply, we are selling a set of skills that are unique amongst consultants and therapists. Rather than being outcome- or content-based, our focus is on the building of relationship and the heightening of awareness. He points out the difficulty, at first, of selling a non-solution-based approach to problems, which often runs contrary to the expectations of our clients, but he also adds that this is what makes us different.

Our second article is Barbara Thomas’s “Countertransference, Dialogue, and Gestalt Therapy.” Gestaltists have long struggled with how to conceptualize and use this energetic residue that tends to distort and color immediate experience. Some go outside of the Gestalt frame, using a psychoanalytic structure to describe this phenomenon of projections and distortions, while others attempt to discuss this concept, relying solely on a Gestalt therapy template (Melnick, 1997). Thomas, after first describing the historical development of countertransference, approaches it from a dialogical perspective, embracing the subjective experience of the therapist. She helps us analyze what
contributes to distortions in dialogue and how these distortions, while common and normal, have the potential of damaging the therapeutic relationship.

Next we have Benjamin Bar-Joseph and Ofer Zwikael’s article, “The Practical Implementation of the Gestalt in Project Management.” What is most pleasing to me about this article is that it takes basic Gestalt concepts, such as the Cycle of Experience, and applies them to a different culture and discipline—project management—which historically has been approached in a goal-directed, linear manner. On the surface, it appears that the Gestalt approach and traditional project management would have little in common. By looking at the Cycle as well as blocks to experience, Bar-Joseph and Zwikael convincingly demonstrate how a Gestalt frame can add value to the project management process.

The role of supervision has always played an important role in psychotherapy and consultation. It helps keep us grounded, allowing us to catch distortions and breaks in contact. In “Supervising the Revisited Fritz Perls: Reflecting on ‘Real Gestalt,’” Lester Wyman and Arie Cohen present a clearly articulated, specific approach to supervision based on Gestalt principles. Using a creative format, they analyze a transcript of a training session of Fritz Perls originally presented by Rosenberg and Lynch (2002).

Our last refereed article is “The Psychosomatic Disorders in a Dependent Personality,” by Giuseppe Iaculo. Gestalt therapy has always struggled with the problems inherent in classifying and diagnosing (Melnick and Nevis, 1998). We are a holistic approach and value treating the whole person. The idea of labeling an individual diminishes hope as well as energy for growth and change. Using vignettes to demonstrate his thesis, Iaculo looks at physical symptoms through a Gestalt lens, defining them as habitual, blocked attempts to make contact.

Returning to our theme of “selling,” it is important that we speak the language of “diagnosis” in order to communicate, while at the same time setting ourselves apart, being different. Iaculo achieves both in this scholarly article.

Back Pages

As usual, we end our issue with Back Pages, a series of short pieces. We start with two book reviews: Maria Hess’s review of Bud Feder’s Gestalt Group Therapy: A Practical Guide, followed by Jody Telfair’s review of Leading People the Black Belt Way by Tim Warneka.

Following those reviews are two essays. The first one is a poetic, lyrical, and personal piece, “Narcissus and Echo: Seduction and a Leave-Taking,” by Carla Gober. The second one is theoretical: “The Myth of Power” by Stephanie Backman and Sonia Nevis, in which they look at power as an interactional process. We end with Talia Levine Bar-Joseph’s personal remembrance of Petruska Clarkson who committed suicide last year. Bar-Joseph captures the personal side of Clarkson, a larger-than-life figure who influenced not only England, but the worldwide Gestalt community through her entrepreneurship, clinical skills, and writing. Clarkson was a prolific author. Among her many works were two important books, Gestalt Counseling in Action (1989) and a biography, Fritz Perls (1993), with Jennifer Mackewn.
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