

COACHING OBLIQUE SHAFTS OF ILLUMINATION

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When this started, I was working for a man named Alan Arnott at Perkins Engines, in England. He was a great, great client and I'd been working there for years. We were in a manufacturing group of about 50 people that had a big problem. Everybody's talking, talking, talking, and I said something. One of the guys stood up and asked Alan, "Why do you hire this guy?" Alan said, quickly and directly, "He's always bringing oblique shafts of illumination. You don't know where it comes from or even what it's about, but it lights up the room. It lights up possibilities that weren't there before he spoke. Some are oblique, some come right through the window, but they light up the situation." Some people got it right away, and we went on with the meeting.

Then, I started to notice how often I do that. You want to talk about business and I'm talking about changing, adding to the sense of what we're doing. People sometimes get up upset..., it had nothing to do with what you were doing. You were attached to what you were doing, and that made a whole lot of sense. I don't plan on introducing oblique shafts of illumination, that's just who I am and what I do. ..., eccentric, coming from up and down and sideways.

At the time, I was in the Gestalt Institute in Cleveland as a student in a certification program. The head teacher was Irving Polster, who now is 100 years old. I talked with him the other day ..., an extraordinary man. Gentle man, genius, deep, deep thinker. And suddenly I realized, that's what he does! He never does what you think he's going to do. I once asked him, "What is God?" He said, "God is the perfect integration of poetry, emotion and ideas." I've lived my whole life with that idea. He's always saying something that has two or three parts, that makes you think something you didn't already think. And I noticed that I was doing that much of the time. I was imitating him without knowing it. I was proud of that and just turned it loose. I then realized that I couldn't not do it. It had become automatic.

I then began to notice that frequently this behavior on my part was driving clients away. They started out loving what I am and what I do, but over time I was making them too uncomfortable. They just wanted to make cars, or jam or applesauce. I was creating games they could not share. Those games would help them tremendously, and when they were in pain, or confusion or had powerful interests at the beginning, they'd play those games and see the benefit. But when things got stable, and pragmatic, they didn't want to do it anymore.

So, I'd move from client to client. It would start out great, but then when they saw that what they had was a screwball on their hands, even when what was coming out was positive, they just wanted to do what was normal in peace. I wasn't stable enough for them and didn't provide enough certainty. They didn't want the endless deep dives into the nature of their reality. They wanted to make money, sell whatever they were selling and not rock the boat. And, I was endlessly wanting deep dives. So... while an oblique shaft of illumination brings insight, new futures, and real thinking, people don't want it when they've got a house to clean, or whatever it is considered essential.

That's what an oblique shaft of illumination is. You see it on television, with the great comedy guys – always saying what's funny and eccentric. That's who I am. So, one of my life challenges is, what the hell should I do? I can't have a stable economic basis. People who make lots of money do the same thing over and over again, stay stable and usually within bounds of what their customers are comfortable with. They're not always bringing oblique shafts of illumination. It's a joke. I'm always looking for the next, better idea. I keep thinking that I don't belong in this world. I don't want to kill myself, but I don't know what world to devote myself to. I find it in Kindred Spirits I talk with and can just be myself spontaneously, but out there in the field it's not stable. So, that's part of this life.

Another part of this life is really wanting transformation. I'm determined to bring about altered states, to cause another level of consciousness, another level of performance, another level of what's real for people. David is a friend who lives in Germany now. He was a transformational trainer for 20 years. He said, if you want to transform something, somebody has to be committed, promised to something. If they're not already committed, it's not going to work. There's also got to be something missing..., something not there, which if it was there, would make a big difference. What's missing? That will get you so far, but still not to a transformation.

Then, the question is, what's missing that gets what's missing to be missing? That's the deep dive for all of us. You ask what's missing that gets what's missing to be missing e.g. Nobody really disagrees with the leader ..., it's just people talking, but it's not directional. But that's where the "wow", the magic comes from. The oblique shaft of illumination comes from being able to see that deeply into any situation. You can transform anything. What's missing that gets what's missing to be missing will take you on a deep dive into what will transform, because that's what's transformational. That's what shapes context and gets what's missing to be actually missing.

I don't actually trust groups. We all think in particular ways that aren't the same. So, the question of what we really care about..., we don't actually get to it. I get demoralized, or even depressed. Alignment is everything. The question, what do you really care about..., we don't actually get to it. But almost

inevitably, as we get deeper & deeper, we find where we're not sharing values and commitments, and the whole thing goes to pieces. I've seen that enough, especially in groups, to not trust them. I know that in a day or a week or a month, we're going to be back in the soup again.

All the way from three marriages to many attempts to collaborate, it starts out great – harmonious, purposeful, exciting. And invariably, except for my present, wonderful wife, we get to something that one or more of the people doesn't really want or is scared of. I asked Zoe Marai, a brilliant counselor, 'if you want to transform a whole company, or a whole group, what do you do?' She said, well, you take the top people and find out what energy they avoid. They've been avoiding it their whole lives, each of them as individuals, and now collectively. Where won't they go? Where are they not liked? And you train them and train them, and train them so they become able, if not to embrace, to at least deal with and operate from energies they typically avoid. There are energies that get avoided. Every time I raise certain kinds of things, it gets killed off. I don't know how that is for other people.

It's actually an energy problem, and the willingness to say the awful truth. Nobody says the awful truth. We talk about what works and so on, but then there's the awful truth. The biggest transformations I've been around have been when I've pressed the awful truth. Somebody says something and I come back with, "That's not awful enough." Then they say something else and I say, "That's not awful enough." What do you experience about how awful it is that you can't just go out and do it? Eventually you'll get to something that's really awful. That's like the big stuck point for everybody. From that, there's almost always a huge transformation, huge breakthrough.

When we reach one of those areas, it is often something that we can then have disappear in the recognition of it. Seeing how it's using us, can we let it go? Or is it something we need to keep revisiting over and over again? It's a 'Moment de Change', a moment of transformation. But in order to say the awful truth, you either have to have it as a discipline, which I do when I work, but if I'm too scared, I don't do it. I 'cozy' it a bit because I don't want to make trouble.

That takes us full circle, to Oblique Shafts of Illumination. That's who you are and what you embody as a context, so when you show up it's almost like you can set your watch to it. The practice of meditation it's so that, at some point, because you practiced it so much, the technique falls away and you just are that I like that except then I think don't belong in this world, which is full of people selling stuff. So, the effect, over time, is that I've gotten really to be a better, quicker counselor. I can read people almost instantly, can get to their racket – their automatic way of being and messing things up for themselves, really fast. And if I'm gentle, it's helpful, effective, and people really like it. But when I'm dealing with a rigid

context, like working for a big organization or a corporation or community or true believer, it's a dilemma. And, I don't want to kill the contract until I trust that the client won't go all the way.

But it's not whole from an Overview Effect, so to speak. Transformation and certainty are reciprocal. You can't have transformation when you're seeking certainty. Doesn't happen. This goes to uncertainty, which is oblique in its nature. I'm saying that transformation and seeking certainty don't exist in the same place.

It's a moment-to-moment thing. Reality is moment to moment to moment. And, reality as a principle, gets flakier and flakier. Therapy, making things better, is always the opposite. If your problem is that you talk too much, the therapy is to not talk so much. If your habit is facilitation, you're there to facilitate, which is a good thing, (I'm not knocking it), but if you're stuck with that, the therapy is to not facilitate. Tell me what you think or ask questions that you don't have the answer to. If you have trouble with relationships with women, you should get to know one without trying to get intimate.

It's always the opposite. What transforms is experience. Most people will not allow themselves to have experiences that their church doesn't like, that their family doesn't like, that their wife doesn't like, whatever. Therapy is the opposite. The obliqueness comes from not being stuck with what you already think. You can't think oblique..., it just happens when you get present.

It's wonderful – I've been doing this Zen mantra, "Om mani padre om", over and over again. It's miraculous, because what happens is that I stop thinking. And when I stop thinking, I'm able to think! I'm able to imagine. I don't know where it comes from, what the source of real thinking is. But most of what we think it is, is not what it is. It's just a way of keeping some boss or someone, in your life and past that you want to make happy.

In a group, some of the time I'm collaborating, but don't feel free. When I talk, they're collaborating but don't feel free. What is it that lets you collaborate and feel free? As my friend Tony Turnbull says and what we do beautifully together, is to "connect and move on." Connect, contact, and move on. Don't get stuck with anything. The brain wants to take over your life, so that it will be consistent, measured, on time and the future won't be dangerous.

You get in trouble from language, from the words. As soon as you think you are the words, you're stuck in subject-object time. As soon as you start to explain anything, you've lost the access to the magic. The magic is in the experience. "I love you" is an experience. If I tell you all the ways I love you, how I love you, why I love you, what stops me from loving you, the magic goes away, by degrees. Life is not a linguistic event. Life is a vibrational, body event. It's an experience. The more you organize stuff, the more the experience gets forced into what's possible from the language. That's a dilemma. Often, what's

successful is when there was very little explanation based language. It was mostly an experience of not knowing, and

I don't really know. I sit now for an hour or two listening to the mantra. It makes me happy and I get empty. Nothingness. What's going on at the core is a void, nothing – no thing. If we can come to this, or at least become continuously aware that what's at the core of this is nothingness, we can then have real thinking. You can invent your thinking. You can say whatever you want. As long as you tell yourself, this is how we did it in our family, or this is how the boss likes it so that's what I'll do, you're stuck. The problem is being stuck. .. yesterday, ... One author wrote that god is Universal Consciousness without an object. That's the most interesting thing I've heard – that god, everything, all meaning, all mystery, all everything is universal consciousness, awake, awareness but has no purpose.

This has a ring of truth to it. In those moments when I've been most creative and collaborative, in the moment before the moment, I've managed to somehow generate emptiness. Nothing. And from there you can create anything. But from anything you already think, feel, want, do, are scared of.., you can't. As a pragmatic practice, there's all kinds of things you can do to help generate it. But without that first part – the freedom to think ---it's not going to be what it could be.

It's like charting a space that allows for that emergence to happen. People might attempt to change the words or language, but that still gets in the way because what really needs to shift is the thinking. Which gives rise to possibly a new language, once you shift the thinking. But it's always from nothing. I'm still grappling with whether it's possible to sustain that magic.

The idea is not being stuck. I like working, making money. But being stuck with it is boring. Obliqueness lets me be free and gives others an opportunity to be free, to freely choose, to be where you are generating one of the choices. Almost everything that's called a choice isn't – it's somebody else's idea. You have to generate the nature of a choice in order for it to be a free choice. And that can only come from nothing. Not a thing. Not an element of history.

In Collaborative Innovation, It really is about choosing freedom and collaboration, because collaboration doesn't always seem natural. Milton, the poet, captured my experience in "Paradise Lost." In (1667), he mentions "Cold Estotiland":

Some say he bid his Angels turne askance
The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more
From the Suns Axle; they with labour pushed
Oblique the Centric Globes: some say the Sun

Was bid turn reins from the Equinoctial Rode
Like distant breadth to Taurus with the Seven
Atlantic Sisters, and the Spartan twins
Up to the Tropic Crab; thence down amaine
By Leo and the Virgin and the Scales,
As deep as Capricorne, to bring in change
Of Seasons to each Clime; else had the Spring
Perpetual smiled on Earth with vernant Flours,
Equal in Days and Nights, except to those
Beyond the Polar Circles; to them Day
Had unbenighted shon, while the low Sun
To recompence his distance, in thir sight
Had rounded still the Horizon, and not known
Of East or West, which had forbid the Snow
From cold Estotiland, and South as far
Beneath Magellan.