



talking about...

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... designing better relationships for better outcomes

A newsletter for those interested in ontological coaching

Giving Authority

In our last article on relating, we touched on the role of authority. This month, we look at what has us give ourselves or others authority.

From our last article, you will recall that we spoke about authority and its fundamental role in our relationships. We claimed authority is a declaration we make in response to others' declarations that validates those declarations for us. Given that we are constantly giving or not giving ourselves and others authority as we listen to declarations, it is vital we understand what has us give authority if we want to understand our relating better.

To do this, we can look at this in two ways – from the perspective of a society and from that of an individual. "Collective authority" is that given to a person who fulfills a certain role within a social structure. For example, when someone becomes a judge, they take on the authority of being a judge and can make declarations in a legal sense. However when a judge retires, they lose the collective authority associated with the role. Collective authority shows up throughout all of our social structures. In an organisational setting, people are given certain authority when they take on certain roles. That authority means those employees can make declarations within and for the organisation in line with their collective authority and those declarations will be valid for the organisation.

The second type of authority we term "personal authority". Personal authority is the authority we individually give in response to any declaration we might hear. This type of authority is informed by collective authority but is not necessarily consistent with it. In other words, as individuals we do not always give our personal authority to someone who might have collective authority.

Let us look at this from an organisational perspective. My boss has collective authority given by the organisation to make certain declarations. Say she decides we have certain work priorities and we will focus on X rather than Y. On the other hand, I believe that Y is far more important than X. Hence even though I know that she has the collective authority to decide what I will do, I am torn about giving her my personal authority for this declaration. I may well ultimately give the authority to her and do what she has decided, however the validity of the decision will most likely still remain in question for me. In other words, I will most likely not be as committed to doing the work.

Similar scenarios are repeated every day as people deal with differences in perceptions of our own and others' authority. When we coach people, one of the questions we often ask relates to the matching or mismatching of authority. Who is giving authority to whom in this situation and how does this then impact that situation? It can be a valuable question to ask yourself when things are not working as you would like.

This begs the question, what has us give personal authority when we make a declaration or listen to one. This can be seen in two key factors – power and trust. In our next newsletter, we will look at power and how that applies to authority and our relationships.

"Losing an illusion makes you wiser than finding a truth."

... Ludwig Borne (1786 – 183)

Have you got all the facts

Thanks to our friend David Chard, who sent this to us. It is a little long, but worth the read.

This is believed to be an actual letter sent to a man named Ryan DeVries by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, State of Michigan and his re-

sponse.

SUBJECT: DEQ File No.97-59-0023; T11N; R10W, Sec. 20; Montcalm County

Dear Mr. DeVries:

It has come to the attention of the Department of Environmental Quality that there has been recent unauthorized activity on the above referenced parcel of property. You have been certified as the legal landowner and/or contractor who did the following unauthorized activity: Construction and maintenance of two wood debris dams across the outlet stream of Spring Pond.

A permit must be issued prior to the start of this type of activity. A review of the department's files shows that no permits have been issued. Therefore, the Department has determined that this activity is in violation of Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams, of the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act, Act 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, being sections 324.30101 to 324.30113 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, annotated.

The Department has been informed that one or both of the dams partially failed during a recent rain event, causing debris and flooding at downstream locations. We find that dams of this nature are inherently hazardous and cannot be permitted. The Department therefore orders you to cease and desist all activities at this location, and to restore the stream to a free-flow condition by removing all wood and brush forming the dams from the stream channel. All restoration work shall be completed no later than January 31, 2005.

Please notify this office when the restoration has been completed so that a follow-up site inspection may be scheduled by our staff. Failure to comply with this request or any further unauthorized activity on the site may result in this case being referred for elevated enforcement ac-

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tion. We anticipate and would appreciate your full cooperation in this matter.

Please feel free to contact me at this office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
David L. Price, District Representative
Land and Water Management Division

** Here is Mr. DeVries' response: **

Re: DEQ File No. 97- 59-0023; T11N; R10W, Sec. 20; Montcalm County.

Dear Mr. Price,

Your certified letter dated 12/17/02 has been handed to me to respond to. I am the legal landowner but not the Contractor at 2088 Dagget, Pierson, Michigan. A couple of beavers are in the process of constructing and maintaining two wood "debris" dams across the outlet stream of my Spring Pond.

While I did not pay for, authorize, nor supervise their dam project, I think they would be highly offended that you call their skillful use of natures building materials "debris." I would like to challenge your department to attempt to emulate their dam project any time and/or any place you choose.

I believe I can safely state there is no way you could ever match their dam skills, their dam resourcefulness, their dam ingenuity, their dam persistence, their dam determination and/or their dam work ethic.

As to your request, I do not think the beavers are aware that they must first fill out a dam permit prior to the start of this type of dam activity.

My first dam question to you is: (1) Are you trying to discriminate against my Spring Pond Beavers, or (2) do you require all beavers throughout this state to conform to said dam request? If you are not discriminating against these particular beavers, through the Freedom of Information Act, I request completed copies of all those other applicable beaver dam permits that have been issued. Perhaps we will see if there really is a dam violation of Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams, of the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act, Act 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, being sections 324.30101 to 324.30113 of the Michigan Compiled Laws, annotated.

I have several concerns. My first concern is; aren't the beavers entitled to legal representation? The Spring Pond Beavers are financially destitute and are unable to pay for said representation -- so the State will have to provide them with a dam lawyer. The Department's dam concern that either one or both of the dams failed during a recent rain event, causing flooding, is proof that this is a natural occurrence, which the Department is required to protect. In other words, we should leave the Spring Pond Beavers alone rather than harassing them and calling their dam names.

If you want the stream "restored" to a dam free-flow condition please contact the beavers -- but if you are going to arrest them, they obviously did not pay any attention to your dam letter, they being unable to read English.

In my humble opinion, the Spring Pond Beavers have a right to build their unauthorized dams as long as the sky is blue, the grass is green and water flows downstream. They have more dam rights than I do to live and enjoy Spring Pond. If the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection lives up to its name, it should protect the natural resources (Beavers) and the environment (Beavers' Dams). So, as far as the beavers and I are concerned, this dam case can be referred for more elevated enforcement action right now. Why wait until 1/31/2005? The Spring Pond Beavers may be under the dam ice then and there will be no way for you or your dam staff to contact/harass them then.

In conclusion, I would like to bring to your attention to a real environmental quality (health) problem in the area. It is the bears! Bears are actually defecating in our woods. I definitely believe you should be persecuting the defecating bears and leave the beavers alone. If you are going to investigate the beaver dam, watch your step! (The bears are not careful where they dump!)

Being unable to comply with your dam request, and being unable to contact you on your dam answering machine, I am sending this response to your dam office.

THANK YOU

RYAN DEVRIES & THE DAM BEAVERS

"First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others."

... Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471)

Our Coach Development Program

We have decided to open up some positions in our Coach Development program. If you are interested in the work we do or ideas and would like to learn more in terms of their practical application, you might like to consider being part of our coach development program. This program is designed for people who want to develop their coaching skills as they can be applied as a professional coach or as an internal coach. It is a two year program that is self-paced in relation to your progress.

If you are interested, you can find more information can be found at <http://www.talkingabout.com.au/Documents/TACP/CoachDevelopment.htm> or give us a call on 613 9507 2464.

Some Interesting Links

We are always receiving links to interesting places on the internet and we thought might share some of them with you. Some foster our thinking and others are just plain amusing. Enjoy!

Some amazing juggling - <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4776181634656145640>

If you are interested in the future and how technology is advancing - <http://www.kurzweilai.net/>
Looking for more enlightenment in life - <http://www.wie.org/>

Take some tests on happiness -- this is seriously researched by Martin Seligman (author of Learned Optimism) and not just a gimmick - <http://www.reflectivehappiness.com/>

Our Web Site

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