



# talking about...

June 2006

... **designing better relationships for better outcomes**

A newsletter for those interested in ontological coaching

## Boundaries and Leadership

*Us and Them  
And after all we're only ordinary men  
Me, and you  
God only knows it's not what we would choose to do  
Forward he cried from the rear  
And the front rank died  
The General sat, and the lines on the map  
Moved from side to side.*

... "Us and Them", Pink Floyd, Dark Side of the Moon

The human use of language is powerful, very powerful. Through it we have been able to create complex societies and intricately shape the resources of the planet. One of the key aspects of our use of language is that we separate one thing from another. We can distinguish an atom from a molecule, a molecule from a cell, a cell from an organ, an organ from a body and so on. These distinctions are done in language by naming things. The power of this use of language is that we can then treat one object as distinct from another and intervene in some way. If we were not able to distinguish a cell from an organ, then we would not have been able to create some of the wonderful medical interventions we see today.

However, this ability of our language to distinguish has a darker side. Whenever, we distinguish something from something else we create a boundary. Some things may lie within the boundary and others outside the boundary. So fundamental is language to the human condition that we usually do not see we do this. Yet it shapes the very essence of what we do all the time. These boundaries always create opposites – what is something and what it is not. For example, if we take a simple chair, we can say that within the boundary of the chair is the chair and outside that boundary of the chair is not the chair.

Not only do we create boundaries around objects, we also create boundaries around ourselves and others. We create a boundary around what is "me" and "not me". We also create a boundary around who are "us" and those who are "not us" who become "them". We use this type of distinction so often that we are mostly blind to the boundaries we are constructing with others. Consider the senior management in an organisation. It is the norm for there to be a "senior management team", which refers to "their organisation". Although this distinction may seem innocuous, we find that senior managers can sometimes transition their way of thinking to speaking about the organisation as something they control rather than something of which they are a part. This often leads to an "us and them" mentality where the "them" includes other members of the organisation. Such boundaries are the place of conflict and lead to breakdowns in organisational coherence as the management team seeks to fix the organisation that does not include themselves. How does this show up? Culture change exercises are for the employees not for the senior managers; certain rules and expectations only apply to the em-

ployees not the managers; employees are seen as a resource not as people – the list is seemingly endless.

To address situations where inappropriate boundaries exist, the key is to recognise where boundaries exist and to change the language to expand where those boundaries sit. In doing so, we bring more people into the "us". This approach is the basis of the expansion of our view of life from egocentric to ethnocentric to a global or world view. Consider for yourself where you draw your boundaries in life and the conflict this creates. Such awareness can be the beginning of a more fulfilling life.

**"A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."**

... **Albert Einstein**

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,  
St Kilda Rd Central,  
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9507 2464

info@talkingabout.com.au  
www.talkingabout.com.au

## Some more gems from children ...

3-year-old Reese: "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name. Amen."

A little boy was overheard praying: "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

After the christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys."

I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime. She would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us from E-mail."

A Sunday school teacher asked her children as they were on the way to church service, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother, Joel, were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? ... They're hushers."

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin 5, and Ryan 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

A father was at the beach with his children when the four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore where a seagull lay dead in the sand.

"Daddy, what happened to him?" the son asked. "He died and went to Heaven," the Dad replied. The boy thought a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back down?"

A wife invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"

*Each of these little gems stems from a way of observing that has someone make sense of what they observe based on what they can distinguish and what they know. Even though it shows up clearly in these anecdotes about children, the same also applies to us as adults – we see the world not as it is, rather as we are.*

***"Coaching happens in the experience of being accepted, respected and heard. Actual words matter less."***

... **Julio Olalla, The Oracle of Coaching**

## More Interesting Links

This month, we would like to re-introduce you to one web site and introduce you to a new one.

Some time ago, we ran a series of seminars in partnership with Chris Lyons from Gloop. Chris is an expert in the use of memory and since our work together he has established an Australian memory record and appeared in the media promoting how to improve our memory and participated in the Australian Memory Championships. In our work, we often meet people who would like to improve their memory, so we thought it was appropriate that we re-introduce you to the Gloop web site. If you would like to improve your memory, check it out at [www.gloop.com.au](http://www.gloop.com.au). It has some great ideas.

Secondly, one of the keys to effective conversations is effective listening skills. The International Listening Leadership Institute provides a wide range of articles on how to improve your ability to listen and how to apply this to your leadership. We invite you take a look - <http://www.listeningleader.com>.

## Our Web Site

More articles and information about our work can be found at our web site, [www.talkingabout.com.au](http://www.talkingabout.com.au). We invite you to take a look.

## Subscribing to talking about

...

Do you know others who might be interested in reading our e-zine? If so please feel free to send them a copy or ask them to register by sending an e-mail to [info@talkingabout.com.au](mailto:info@talkingabout.com.au).

**To unsubscribe from this e-zine, simply reply to this e-mail with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject area.**