

CINDERELLA AND OTHER STORIES

It is interesting that stories of a person being changed from one type of being into another have attracted substantial audiences in every generation. There was the fairy tale "Cinderella", George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion", later made popular by the film "My Fair Lady", and more recently "Pretty Woman". There are factual stories of a similar kind, that of Richard Branson being just one example. On one level these are rags to riches stories, but more importantly they are stories of potential being recognised and as a consequence, people and situations being transformed.

These stories, both factual and fictional, although encapsulating elements of recognition and the resulting transformation, are also stories reliant on an individualistic and problem-solving approach to life. However, other stories, such as the world response to the Tsunami in 2004, the Make Poverty History campaign and the deal agreed by G7 finance ministers in London on June 11 2005, are stories which it might be argued include a relational and transformative view of life. These are situations in which individuals or groups of individuals have looked at the position they are in from the view point not only of themselves, as they might do in an individualistic and problem solving approach, but also from the viewpoint of the other. **They have considered the needs of themselves, the needs of the other and the relationship between the two.** This fuller perspective brings a greater understanding of the predicament and a deeper appreciation of the *whole* problem, offering more effective ways of moving forward to make the situation better for all parties. So, if Cinderella's Fairy Godmother had taken a relational and transformative view, in addition to providing the opportunity to go to the ball, she might also have helped Cinderella understand the jealousy of her step-sisters and the ways in which some of



their unmet needs were causing them to be so horrid.

This different understanding of the situation might have offered Cinderella the opportunity to retain and improve her family relationships as well as finding her Prince Charming and so live a more rounded life.

There is a shift in world mood, suggesting that we may be witnessing the growth of what Baruch-Bush and Folger (2004) call the 'Relational worldview', a view which understands that most things in life are connected, that they have some relationship with each other and if we are to reach the most effective solutions to difficulties, we need to bear this in mind. This view promotes the importance of recognising the opinions and experiences of the other in order to bring transformation to the way in which we understand and value our own position more clearly. This greater understanding of all the levels and facets of the problem encourages solutions which are more effective.

What brings about such a change in approach? What needs to happen to change a person's view from an individualistic and problem-solving one to a transformative one, where the importance of relationship is acknowledged? It is argued by some who write and teach in the fields of mediation and conflict management, that recognition leads to transformation. This is not rocket science. When an individual feels understood and accepted, in other words

recognised, they are more likely to feel motivated to work co-operatively and creatively not only for themselves, but also with those around them, particularly those who offer them the recognition in the first place. In other words they are more likely to work to bring a change or transformation to the situation in which they find themselves.

Why is such a change of view desirable in the workplace? It is clear that the way in which work is viewed as part of society, is changing. Putting the words "work/life balance" into a search on Google will bring up thousands of websites extolling the virtues, and advising practices which encourage a more equal balance between work and home life. It is commonplace for organisations to rationalise and require the remaining staff to cover the gaps. The Civil Service for instance has planned job cuts of 84,000 jobs (The Guardian, June 13 2005). In such a work environment, transformation which includes "valuing behaviour that integrates strength of self and compassion for others" (Baruch-Bush and Folger, 2004 pg 230) is an advantage. In this definition of transformation it is suggested that "strength of self" is taken to mean knowing and using one's own resources to the full. "Compassion for others" is taken to mean looking beyond self and attending to the needs of others in a way which promotes the most effective way forward in any given situation.

Imagine a workplace where each individual understands and uses all their resources and also encourages others to do the same. This would encourage a workplace culture which is supportive, educative, positive and constructive. It would mean a workplace which is inclusive not exclusive, integrative not oppositional and where both autonomy of the individual and caring for self and others are valued. It would mean working to enhance the best of individuals, teams and the organisation and to minimise the weaknesses of individuals, teams and organisations.

A transformational/relational view encourages a more positive working environment which could be expected to reduce costs

Is this transformational/relational view cost effective? A lesson could be learned from Mark Loehr, CEO of SoundView Technology and the way his organisation recovered from the disaster on 11 September 2001 (Goleman, 2002). His immediate response was to focus on the emotional needs of his staff and the relationships between them. He encouraged them to come into the office on September 12, not to work, but to discuss the way they felt and to talk through what they should do next. His relational and transformative view motivated his staff to the point where they made \$6million on one day, when they would normally have expected to make \$1 million (Goleman, 2002). Clearly the exceptional circumstances resulting from September 11 had some impact on this increase, but interestingly other companies did not experience anything like the same level of increase. A transformational/relational view encourages a more positive working environment which could be expected to reduce costs in terms of lower staff turnover, less recruitment and selection expenditure, less time and resources spent on grievance, disciplinary and capability procedures, lower sickness absence costs and higher creativity and output due to more motivated staff with better workplace relationships.

How can an approach which focuses on the importance of relationship in the workplace be encouraged? The basic building blocks of a relational style are good listening skills, where understanding the experience of the other is paramount, rather than waiting for an opportunity to offer suggestions and solutions. An understanding of and an ability to communicate empathy makes the most of opportunities to promote transformation. Too many management

training and development programmes miss out this essential first step of teaching solid listening and empathy skills. Without these skills, so necessary for identifying and working with possible areas of transformation, the value of second level skills such as understanding the motives of individuals and organisations, understanding and working with interpersonal dynamics and working with different roles within teams is drastically reduced.

Apart from improving the basic skills of individuals, understanding and using emotional intelligence in relationships in the workplace is essential (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Goleman's book "The New Leaders" (2002) explores fully the importance of "cultivating leaders who generate the emotional resonance that lets people flourish." A relational approach can be further encouraged by adopting appropriate management styles, such as the systems thinking approach, which encourage awareness and understanding of relationships at all levels within the organisation, as well as building relationships with customers/consumers and outside providers of products and services.

So, getting back to Cinderella and her Fairy Godmother... An awareness of the power and transformation brought by a relational view and model underpins The Baobab Centre's approach to working with individuals, teams and organisations and is a key element in all the services we offer including counselling, coaching, mentoring, mediation, personal and professional development, enhancing team working, organisational development, policy development and management of change. So if you, or your organisation, are looking for support and encouragement in working to build, understand and maintain relationships in the workplace why not get in touch with us for more information. We may not have a magic wand like the Fairy Godmother, but our experience, gained over many years, is that the transformation

brought about by paying attention to the relationship issues can be just as magical.■

Gayle-Anne Drury
Co-founder of The Baobab Centre
July 2005

If you are interested in reading more about recognition, transformation, the relational model and its impact in different areas at work the following books may be a good starting place.

Bagshaw, M. (2000) *Using Emotional Intelligence at Work* Ely, Cambs: Fenman Training

Baruch Bush, R.A. and Folger, J. P. (2004) *The Promise of Mediation: Responding to Conflict Through Empowerment and Recognition* The Jossey-Bass Conflict Resolution Series

Cherniss, C. and Goleman, D. (Editors) (2001) *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select For, Measure and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups and Organization* New York: Jossey Bass Wiley

Erskine, R.G. (1999) *Beyond Empathy - A Therapy of Contact in Relationships* London: Brunner/Mazel

Goleman, D. (1999) *Emotional Intelligence* London: Warner Books

Goleman, D. (2002) *The New Leaders* London: Warner Books

Lamont, G. (2002) *The Spirited Business* London: Hodder and Stoughton

Peltier, B. (2001) *The Psychology of Executive Coaching* New York: Brunner-Routledge

Tehrani, N. (ed.) (2001) *Building a Culture of Respect: Managing Bullying at Work* London: Taylor Francis