

December Newsletter 2009



The Baobab Centre
Inspiring potential and growth
and offering greetings for the season
and best wishes for your new year



Dear friends and colleagues,

I'm writing this knowing that when it arrives in your inbox, amongst your (P_?) papers in your intray or through your letterbox you will be four or so weeks away from Christmas. So I am writing to you in the future - you are reading this from my past. How very Dickens!

So what did Charles Dickens want us to consider with *A Christmas Carol*? To rekindle some Christmas spirit, to tell us you can't take it with you - enjoy it; that money doesn't bring joy but rather love, kinmanship and kindness does? Does he imply the miserly will get their come-uppance? Perhaps we should take heed of his thoughts in this sometimes bleak era. Who knows what Dickens thought? I'm sure you all have lots of ideas. However it makes us here at The Baobab Centre think about our past, present, future and it has formed the theme for this newsletter.

This issue also includes a letter, with a twist, from a colleague, for which we are grateful. Her message is in response to one of our past articles, it talks of how emotions may be present, and we send her thoughts into your future. Gayle-Anne offers a reflective piece from her past year, and we also review this year offering some notions of what keeps us present and some of our great expectations for the future.

We also wish to send our thanks to all of you who have invited us in to your lives and shared experiences, ideas and indeed hard times with us this year. We hope you know how much we value you, and extend our thanks to you for your engagement and support. We look forward to continued and much valued work with you all in the future.

And before this little ditty turns curiously into too duplicitous a tale, our final gifts to you are a quiz on the back page and the themed title search in this opening - to use whenever the past or the future is getting to you so that you might enjoy some fun or focus in the present!!

Nic (you know NN!)

Past, present and future

The Baobab Centre is an organisation of consultants, trainers, psychotherapists, community leaders and business people. The organisation was founded by Manar Matusiak and Gayle-Anne Drury in 2003 with a passionate drive to provide people with affordable support when they experience difficulties at work or in their personal lives. Both Gayle-Anne and Manar recognised that helping individuals could also be achieved by helping organisations manage interpersonal conflicts, and therefore they work to embrace and enrich the experience organisations offer to its employees.

Past: how have we done this?

This year, so far, The Baobab Centre has custom designed, written and facilitated workshops on: managing bullying and harassment in the workplace; managing stress; customer relations; equality and fairness; self reflective management and leadership; listening skills; coaching and listening skills; motivational styles; creative management; death; managing job boundaries; team dynamics. We have met with over three hundred different individuals in a supporting role, have exchanged information with over 1000 named or known people (one of those may be you). We currently facilitate several ongoing self-development groups based either in or outside work places. We have been working steadily to create a charitable side to the organisation which will deliver free support to people who cannot otherwise receive it. It has been a busy, challenging, delightful and engaging year. On our own terms we have also each made personal changes, achieved some life goals and experienced our colleagues, our friends, our families and *you* deeply, as part of the way we are.

Present: what informs what we do?

We believe that everyone, every group, every organisation, experiences the world and each other in different ways. These experiences are informed by our past, our understanding from educational opportunities, training, culture, families, our social conditions. We aim to help people learn about themselves, know who they are and find ways to understand why they may react in certain ways in certain situations, with certain problems or life crises. We offer people opportunities to use some theories of being a human being, a chance to rail against an often cruel and unfair world; and to help find a route through in the maelstrom. We do this because we are bothered about what happens to people. We

know just how hard it can be and especially just how very, very hard it can be to ask for help or to say "I'm unhappy"; "I'm sorry"; "I'm scared"; or "I don't know what to do". We don't offer set packages or generic answers - but rather real human responses to real human problems.

We are all committed to self-development so we are always taking on new theories, and keeping our finger on the pulse of what is happening in our own specialisms as well as what is happening in the world - such as paying attention to the impact of this economic and social climate; but most importantly of all by listening to you.

Why should you bother? Perhaps some of these comments, said about our work over the last year might help answer that?

'Very challenging and different delivery methods based upon differentiation of group'

'So useful. Stress management & advice on reducing it should be rolled out to all employees'

'Extremely well structured, prepared and presented. Good interpersonal and group dynamics. Well pitched to a range of staff'

'Brilliant - probably the best I have been on. The bit about confronting a bully respectfully is something I can use in my life and teach my children'

(For many more testimonials please go to http://www.baobabcentre.com/pages/Why_Choose_Baobab/testimonials.htm)

Future: so what and where next?

We want to keep working with you. We want to keep hearing about the things you are interested in or struggling with.

We shall be running a range of workshops next year based on your needs and our expertise.

We shall be running another "Death Weekend" - in February, you can see the comments from a participant on the previous Death weekend on our website at http://www.baobabcentre.com/pdf/Newsletters/Baobab_Feb_2008_Newsletter.pdf.

In addition; we will be running "Emergence" the new iteration of the wilderness weekend which is all about your self and your relationship to and with the natural environment. A chance to experience nature and be creative - this will be based in the Lake District and has options for walkers and non walkers alike. This weekend will be in April.

Let us know if you are interested (no obligation) in either or both of these residential events by phone, email or letter.

If there is something you think we might be able to help you with, please contact us. All first discussions are free - and if we don't think we can help we will be honest and say so - so we won't give you flannel.

We will support you and facilitate you through your challenges.

A reflection on why we should bother

I was in Geneva in the summer where the United Nations was celebrating the Year of Astronomy, 2009. A large display situated between Lac Lemman and the luxury hotels housing diplomats and business people from all over the world, was trying to bring people's focus to understanding that we are all part of one earth.

Shortly after enjoying the display, I found myself sitting in the park by the lake, breathing in the peace, noticing the inviting, crystal clear water, the seemingly endless blue sky and the luscious green earth, while enjoying the cool, invigorating breeze and the comforting, heart-healing sunshine.

I watched a family who were also basking in the sun. The Mother was lithe, strong, and beautiful – her long, shiny, mahogany hair piled lazily on top of her head. Her bare feet carrying her on the earth beneath her with a solidity and security borne of her sense of her authority in her world. The Father was bronzed, toned and casually chic. His confidence and his subtly communicated yet obvious wealth surrounding him like a silken shroud. Their small daughter seemed oblivious, unknowing, nestled carelessly in the parental cocoon holding her. Her every move displaying her casual acceptance of the enveloping care that has always been hers.

I watched as these doting, attentive parents

worked together, caressing their child as they applied the much needed sun lotion. Their hands, their eyes, their movements, consistently carrying their messages of never-ending love. Their child's head, held high with the confidence of those who are adored, her slight frown, her impatient, flashing eyes, her desire to be free of this cossetting, this gift of loving which to her felt so natural, so constant, she barely appreciated it. Yet, I wondered, what devastation would she experience if it were gone?

I thought about the display I had just seen. I thought about the striking but artificial colours used by NASA and others when publishing photographs of our universe. I reflected yet again on our understandings or lack of understandings of what in our lives and our world is myth and what is real. I thought again of how our only reality is the given, present moment. Our greatest myth is perhaps our belief in constancy. Our trust in a certain level of constancy means we miss the vibrancy, the potency, the gift of each present moment.

When I witnessed that small child taking so much for granted, I asked myself – what do I take for granted? So I ask you – what do you take for granted? What does our family, our workplace, our society, our world take for granted? And what do you or I think we should do about any of that?

Why should I spend time reflecting on a small family scene I witnessed for no more than five minutes in Geneva? Why is it important? One of the questions we are asking in this newsletter is why should you bother? Why do we bother to write reflections like the one above?

As therapists, coaches and managers, we are very aware of the dangers of neglecting our thinking or feeling about our past, our present or our future. Neglect of any of these times of our lives holds slightly different traps for us to fall into if we are not vigilant. If we fail to pay attention to our past we may be driven by repeating processes and dynamics we don't understand and cannot change. If we fail to pay attention to our present we miss the only thing of which we can be assured, the existence of the present moment. If we fail to pay attention to our future we may be carried along on the whims and fancies of life and of those around us, maybe missing our own goalposts. We ask people to question what they think or feel, to ask what is myth, what is reality, what belongs in my past, how does this inform my present and how does it help me plan for my future? It is our belief and our experience that by doing

so we can improve our present moment, our lived reality.

I will leave you with these sobering words from songwriter Jack Johnson in the hope they will inspire you to think and feel further and deeper – you never know where it may take you.

Gayle-Anne Drury

"Never Know"

Extract from a song by Jack Johnson

It's shocking but we're nothing

We're just moments.

We're clever but we're clueless

We're just human.

Amusing and confusing

But we're trying.

But where is this all leading?

We never know.

<http://www.jackjohnsonmusic.com/music/detail/inbetweendreams/>

A letter in response to our May Issue

Dear Maual

Thank you for the May edition of the Baobab newsletter.

I appreciated your thoughts on the first page, and agreed with many of them, especially those on the benefits of self-reflection. This, to me, is so much of what Baobab enables people to do in a way which is gentle and respectful but also very challenging.

I do wonder, though, about "avoiding anxiety" and "anger is our better servant"

of danger. So many people these days seem to believe that the so-called "difficult" emotions need to be eliminated, medicated or tamed.

Are they not part of the whole gamut of human emotion?

Please do not misunderstand me: these feelings can be debilitating, frightening and sometimes life-threatening. But do they not have things to tell us? What has gone wrong in life? What might I need to pay attention to? What needs to change? Might I need to show compassion to myself for feeling these things instead of shame and condemnation? Is it not human to feel angry in the face of oppression or injustice (personal as well as global)? Is there not an energy there which could be helpful?

For these reasons and more, I remain very wary of anxiety and anger management training.

Some of my thoughts in response to yours - thank you for a stimulating newsletter!

I hope all is well with you and hope to see you in the not too distant future.

With warmest wishes to you and for the future of Baobab

The Baobab Centre Christmas Quiz

In various surveys cited by Edge magazine 2009 the following percentages appear. Can you guess what they said?

1. What percentages of employees experience stress at work?
16% 46% 76% 93%
2. What percentage of workers have fallen asleep at their desk?
8% 18% 28% 38%
3. What percentage of workers have come back to work drunk after lunchtime?
16% 36% 56% 76%
4. What percentage of workers say they are most motivated by the respect of their colleagues?
5% 15% 25% 35%
5. What percentage of workers say they are most motivated by money at work?
7% 17% 27% 37%

And some questions from the Baobab team...

6. What is the estimated number of days lost annually as a result of bullying or harassment at work?
8 million 18.9 million 34 million 340 million
7. Which of these services does The Baobab Centre provide?
 - a. Coaching
 - b. Counselling
 - c. Mediation
 - d. Mentoring
 - e. Myers-Briggs
 - f. Training
8. Where would you find a baobab tree?
 - a. Southern Africa
 - b. South America
 - c. South West Australia
9. Which of the following can the baobab tree provide?
 - a. Food
 - b. Shelter
 - c. Rope
 - d. Transport
 - e. Medicine
10. What links questions 1-5 with questions 6-9?

6 18.9 million 7 All of them 8 Not South America 9 All of them 10 Workplace support from The Baobab Centre	Quiz answers 1 76% 2 28% 3 56% 4 15% 5 27%	In Nic's welcome letter there were direct or indirect references to: Pickwick Papers A Christmas Carol A Tale of Two Cities Bleak House Hard Times Great Expectations The Old Curiosity Shop Oliver Twist Nicholas Nickleby
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He that would be a leader must also be a bridge. - Welsh Proverb