

Facilitating *with* Heart

Inspiring Personal Transformation and Social Change

Martha Lasley

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with
Heart

Coaching for Personal Transformation and Social Change

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Facilitating with Heart: Coaching for Personal Transformation and Social Change

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Chapter I

Welcome to Facilitating with Heart

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. — Anne Frank

The world needs competent, caring facilitators to bring people together and address the challenges of our times. It takes gutsy, dedicated people to deal with such haunting nightmares as child soldiers trying to reunite with their families, villages who want to stop female infanticide, urban gangs who are fed up, towns recovering from environmental disasters, and victims of sex trafficking reclaiming their freedom. It's a wonder we get any sleep at all. The need for facilitators is both widespread and close to home: a parent wants to reconnect with an estranged child, an entrepreneur wants to turn the workplace into a more humane environment, a teacher wants to help students become leaders, sisters want to resolve an old conflict, and social activists want to work more collaboratively to realize their dreams. Where others throw up their hands in despair, facilitators trust the process, help people open their hearts to each other, and transform nightmares into dreams.

I became a facilitator because I love to create nurturing environments for transforming distress into compassion. Inspired by people who make change look easy, I learned to facilitate by diving into the deep end of the pool. Sometimes facilitation *is* easy. Other times I'm clueless. So I read,, go to training, get tips from seasoned professionals, and continue to pick up new skills and insights every time I step into the fire.

The magical transformational moments sustain me, but I learn even *more* when things fall apart. In the spirit of learning what works and what doesn't, I interviewed facilitators, coaches, and social change activists, gathering stories about breakdowns and breakthroughs. In addition to their stories, I'm including plenty of my own – some euphoric, some horrific, but all learning opportunities. The beauty of facilitating transformation is that even when we hit a bump in the road, the process is life affirming and the opportunities for growth keep expanding.

This book is for you if you want to find new ways to enliven transformational processes that:

- Open groups and organizations to their passion, loving energy, and possibilities.
- Expand the opportunities for awakening growth and healing.
- Help people crack their hearts open and connect more deeply with each other.
- Enhance social change initiatives with compassionate sustainable practices.
- Support human evolution by living on the creative edge.

Facilitation supports human evolution because it calls out the best in people. Imagine a world where we believe in our collective wisdom to solve our own problems and know how to tap each other's

deepest longing. Imagine interacting with teenagers, CEOs, prisoners, partners, or gang members from that perspective. We can apply facilitation skills to every part of our lives, at home, at work, or when we're alone. These life skills raise our emotional and spiritual intelligence and help us empower others to create more fulfilling lives and a better world.

As a trainer of visionary leaders and transformational coaches, I've led many workshops where people are hungry for growth and want a holistic approach to changing themselves and their organizations. Likewise, when I mediate disputes, I've noticed that people want far more than a desirable outcome. For example, after they agree on the tough decisions of how they'll share custody of the children, the parents want to trust they can talk to each other without someone storming out. After all, they're going to co-parent for years to come. Whether the couple feels heartbroken or relieved to be splitting up, more than anything, *they want to be understood*. Despite this basic human desire, and even with all the processes and tools available to support growth and recovery, there's only one thing that consistently liberates people – opening our hearts.

The Facilitating with Heart Process

When we listen to people's hearts, we connect with the part of them that's moving. By listening to the life energy, we hear what's stirring, what's awakening, what they're longing for. Putting our attention on the life force of the group we invite them into an intimate, safe space. By feeling the depth of their unique experience, and conveying our understanding of their experience, participants feel moved and empowered to open their own hearts. As we listen for individual and collective longing, we capture the essence of what is emerging in the group.

Typically a facilitator is not a content expert and doesn't give advice or participate in the decisions, but instead actively engages in the group's process. But to access the heart of people, and a group, we need to be more than a process expert – *we need to bring our own hearts into the process*.

Sometimes people come into the room completely closed to each other, but as they open up and others listen, really listen, they feel understood and their hearts melt. When the heart strings are pulled, people come closer together and they're more willing to engage in the process of collaboration and finding solutions collectively. If the facilitator sits there unmoved, participants tend to do the same. But as we step into each person's experience fully, and really feel their heartache, yearning or their joy... if we open ourselves to each and every person, they're moved to dive in with us.

I'm calling for a deeper level of interaction that is intimate, profound and moving. What makes this approach unique is that facilitators:

- Bring heart and soul into the facilitation process
- Create a culture of shared power and inclusion
- Transform judgment into compassion
- Support development of facilitation skills
- Share our own vulnerable work of personal transformation

As facilitators, we are compassionate catalysts, continuously creating openings for the light to shine in. I'm motivated to co-create a learning community of people who are actively committed to

contributing to human evolution. Specifically I'm writing for both new and seasoned facilitators who aspire to integrate the physical, energetic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of transformation.

I love working with transformation geeks: people who support deep change: enhancing growth at personal, group, organizational, and societal levels. Transformation geeks are everywhere – we practice the art informally with family, neighbors, friends, and colleagues. More formally, we develop human potential through a wide variety of professions – as facilitators, activists, coaches, consultants, mediators, counselors, and trainers. But we also work in non-profits, education, therapy, social work, politics, business, philanthropy, medicine, psychology, law, and many other professions.

My vision is to see people from every nook and cranny of the world skilled in facilitating heart connection. It won't be long before facilitation skills spread like mushrooms after a soaking rainstorm and a critical mass of people can support transformational processes. We'll be able to go to any of our neighbors, co-workers, or on-line communities where we'll find people who empathically witness our personal growth, help us transform relationships, mediate conflicts, develop organizations, or support social change initiatives. I'm writing to help people deepen these basic but extraordinary life skills of *Facilitating with Heart*. This crazy beautiful world is changing at the speed of light, which means my dream of a skilled facilitator in every family and every work group could be realized soon, so I'm writing as if it's already so. For some of us, we already have access to skilled facilitators and now we have the opportunity to reach out to the rest of the world and impact human evolution.

Create a culture of inclusion and shared power

Vibrant groups have one thing in common – participants are fully heard. The simple practice of listening deeply helps build a sense of inclusion, which improves the way people work together, plan, solve problems, make decisions, and collaborate. As facilitators, we enhance the sense of inclusion by providing a safe space for dialogue and ensuring that radically different view points are welcome. Originally, Robert's Rules of Order was devised as a structure to help everyone be heard, but there's a lot more we can do to create a culture of shared power and inclusion. Our role is to give each person the support to recognize their innate power, take ownership of what happens in the group, and take responsibility for the outcome. Instead of overpowering participants, we embrace our own power and the power of each individual, inviting people to challenge us and further our own development. Our empowering presence awakens people to their own latent or emerging power. The facilitator creates the space for empowerment, but is not the one *in power*, or the one with all the wisdom, or the one responsible for the results. Instead of having all the answers, we trust the wisdom of the group which unleashes people's innate power.

When I walk into a group, I can intuitively sense who has the power just by the way they carry themselves. This is particularly obvious in prisons where the powerlessness is bone crushing, and in corporations where the competition for power is both flagrant and covert. Many people who are vying for power have no intention of sharing their power with others until they realize that shared power means more power for everyone, including themselves. I define power as the ability to fulfill needs. If I use my power to meet only *my* needs, I don't have nearly as much power as when I mobilize resources to meet the needs of all people, all life.

Transform judgment into compassion to support transformation

Sometimes we lose sight of our shared power and find ourselves making moralistic judgments or comparisons. Instead of taking a pathological view and assuming we're going to fix people who are broken, we take the view that people are already whole and moving toward a fuller expression of their wholeness. Instead of labeling groups as dysfunctional, or individuals as disruptive, we consciously open ourselves to seeing their full humanity and understanding their behavior as their best attempt at getting what they need. By seeing their positive intent and holding each person with care, a gentle compassion permeates the group. The openness and acceptance frees people to contribute their ideas and talents. When each person has an open invitation to show up fully, natural creativity is unleashed.

How in the world do we offer compassion to the snipers, bulldozers, jokesters and resisters? It's easy to facilitate people who are hungry for transformation, learning and mutual support, but what about the people who have no desire to change anything? The process is not about changing them, but changing ourselves; transforming our judgments into a warm pool of understanding and opening our hearts to everyone's full humanity. And I do mean everyone!

If we find ourselves judging anyone, and then beating ourselves up for being judgmental, that's a perfect opportunity to get curious about our own positive intent. Underneath the self-judgment, we'll find an unmet need. When we appreciate how that need drives our behavior, we open ourselves to deeper self-acceptance. From that place, we can more readily accept another's gifts, values, and desires. In the same way that we honor each part of ourselves, we can honor every aspect of the group, even when people cast disparaging looks or shout at each other. The challenge is to see each person and each expression as a gift. When people are fully heard and understood, they open to the transformational process and venture into a deeper space. A sense of movement replaces the static energy of judgment and diagnosis.

When a facilitator diagnoses or labels a participant, such as "passive-aggressive", the participant doesn't know what to do with the discomfort, except to move as quickly as possible somewhere else. Even minor judgments such as "She's reserved," leave people feeling pressure or isolation. The alternative – empathic uncovering of needs – changes the energy flow to joint exploration, discovery, and support. Instead of distancing someone by labeling them passive-aggressive, or reserved, we can connect with their desire for both safety and harmony.

The exploration of needs is an empowering process. We all know about needs, but digging beneath the surface and developing a deep understanding of the needs *right now*, give people such clarity about what's driving them *in this moment*. This process shatters the self-judgment and replaces the negative self-talk with an affectionate self-awareness. When people are deeply understood and received, that's when transformation is most likely to take place. As we move toward understanding of ourselves and others at the core, we build relationships and can simultaneously create shared visions, strategic plans, and compelling goals. Offering unconditional love or simply holding each person with positive regard helps the group generate creative ideas, resolve tough conflicts and achieve their objectives. Compassionate exploration of what is emerging creates a more open, loving environment where empowerment and healing can go deeper, feel more complete, and have a longer-lasting impact.

Support development of facilitation skills

The exciting role of a developmental facilitator is to help the group define and achieve their objectives, and *simultaneously* help participants learn to facilitate their own process. In traditional

facilitation, we have our hands full just helping groups solve tough problems. So why would we take on the bigger task of developing the group's facilitation skills at the same time? The short-term fix leaves the group dependent on the facilitator. In contrast, a developmental facilitation process helps groups function more effectively now *and* in the future. They learn how to connect, communicate without blame, and streamline the decision-making process. Group members enhance their own facilitation skills as they go, which reduces dependence on the facilitator. Serving as a guide and catalyst, the facilitator helps people focus their energy while creating opportunities for profound learning, creativity, productivity, and ownership.

When we have two facilitators serving the group, we model shared leadership and develop open-hearted relationships that invite participants to step onto the playing field with us and share in the role of supporting the group's process. While one facilitator holds the direction of the group, the other can offer mentoring to participants as they work on their facilitation skills. As participants step up to the plate to facilitate, that doesn't mean we abandon our role; we simultaneously offer encouragement and mentoring for those who choose to get in the game.

To raise the bar even further, facilitators demonstrate openness to learning, not just from our fellow facilitators, but from the group. Early in creating the alliance with the group, we ask for permission to take risks, try new innovative ways of facilitating, actively solicit input and feedback, and co-create new opportunities for growth. Instead of putting pressure on ourselves to have it all together, we openly share our growing edges, publicly set intentions for what we hope to learn, and create opportunities for others to do the same. Instead of going behind the curtain with our co-facilitator to resolve issues and coming out with a smile, we openly discuss issues and concerns so that people can witness the power of live conflict, including the chaos and not knowing what will happen. We all learn more from what is happening now than from sharing case studies or anecdotes about conflicts already resolved.

When the culture supports the development of facilitation skills, we build capacity from within. No more unproductive meetings that cost thousands of dollars an hour. Instead, people take ownership of the meetings, recognizing that all of the people in the meeting are responsible for the outcomes. As more and more people develop facilitation skills, the confusing discussions, adversarial attitudes, power struggles, and mediocre decisions are replaced by open, productive dialogues. Wholehearted participation in planning, problem-solving, and decision-making at all levels results in saved resources. Around the world, in every sector, management and leadership styles are changing, and simple facilitation skills that help people connect at the heart level make a big difference.

Share our own vulnerable personal transformation

Is devotion to others a cover for the hungers and the needs of the self, of which one is ashamed? I was always ashamed to take. So I gave. It was not a virtue. It was a disguise.

—Anais Nin

As facilitators, we offer a wonderful vehicle for transformation for our clients. Many of us are drawn to the helping professions because we want to help or to make a difference. The danger is that we become “compulsive helpers” as a distraction from doing our own personal growth work or getting the help we need for ourselves. In any helping profession, it’s easy to dismiss our own needs and avoid doing our own inner work. We put our attention on others because they suffer so much. Many in the helping professions become spectators, but as we witness the deep work of others, it opens us to identify our own suffering, connect with the desire to liberate our souls, and bring the rejected parts into the light.

When we focus on the growth and development of *other people*, the irony is that the beautiful messiness and energy shifts happen internally anyway. If we bring our hearts and soul into the process, once we get into the fray, we have nowhere to hide. Evan Harris from Sydney, Australia describes the inevitability of personal transformation as a facilitator:

At some point we have to jump off the high diving board. In that messy situation, a grace enters. I belong to, rather than separate myself from, the group. The messiness comes from the process of breaking up barriers between myself and others. The walls crack and things get shaken up. The conflict jolts a few stones out of the wall and allows the grace to emerge.¹

The stone wall that separates us from others crumbles when we choose to belong to the group. As we continuously do our own internal work, we deepen our self-love which opens our hearts to others. In turn, when we receive each member of the group with unconditional love, their own walls come down. Undefended hearts radically shift the energy, the power dynamics, and the capacity of the group.

That’s just a taste of what we’ll explore as we venture into the challenges of facilitating. We’re about to take a look at the model and values that give life to this process. Before we go on to the next section, put the book down, take three deep breaths while you connect with your deepest desires for a better world.

The COEUR Model

It takes a lot of heart and fierceness to facilitate groups that seek social change. At the root of the French word *coeur* (heart) is the word courage. It takes courage to sit in the fire with people as they uncover their passion and rage, and rise out of the ashes to co-create a better future. We start by creating

¹ Evan Harris personal interview 2/20/2008.

a safe place for people to come together to connect across differences and make choices that benefit all of us. I trust that people want to open their hearts to each other, even when they claim they don't. This is not business as usual, because we engage people at a deep level, using more than just their brains. We breathe magic into the process just by focusing on the wisdom of our hearts. Our role as facilitators is to step into the fire by creating opportunities to:

Connect – create awareness of our shared humanity

Objective – clarify the shared purpose or aim

Empathize – discover the feelings and needs of each contributor

Unify – open to the collective desire for transformation

Respond – take actions that meet the needs of the group

Connect: How do we create awareness of each and every person's full humanity? Our role as facilitators is to open the group to their innate wisdom, so that we can appreciate the essence of each soul and open to the magic of the group process. We start with self-connection which makes it much easier to connect to the aliveness of each individual in the group. Becoming grounded and attentive to what's alive in *every* moment helps us facilitate deeper connections. From that place we generate curiosity, trust and openness. Even when a group member is deeply conflicted, wants to leave the group, or is filled with anger, we can hold the tension as an expression of passion and a desire to connect. Some of the things we do as facilitators are:

- Use breath work to notice that we all share the same air and the same universal desires
- Create safe space to practice radical self-honesty in every moment
- Do the inner work and the outer work simultaneously
- Tear our hearts open to the people we find most challenging
- Transform judgment into compassion

Objective: How do clarify the shared purpose and open the group to their shared vision? In this stage, we break things wide open by helping people express their passion, determine their desired direction and clarify what they really want to get out of their time together. They open to the great mystery, fresh possibilities and new pathways. We want to know what makes their hearts soar, so we explore both the short and long-term goals of the group. Collectively the group defines specific outcomes they wish to achieve. Even when a group has a clear purpose before the gathering, we invite them to talk about their hopes and dreams so that the group attunes to each other *now* and co-creates a shared sense of direction. We invite people to step into their full power – not power over others – but shared power where everyone can flourish. We all have our natural styles, but we encourage everyone to expand their range and step out of their comfort zone. In this stage we:

- Clarify the group's direction and then stretch into the unknown
- Set the intention of how we'll use our time and then let go
- Fill ourselves with curiosity, welcoming yearning and longing
- Encourage expression of passion and open the group to fresh discoveries
- Invite people to take risks and avoid editing themselves or censoring others

Empathize: How do we support empathic communication? To deepen awareness, we reflect each speaker's feelings and needs with compassion. Radically different from reflecting the content, we acknowledge each person's underlying motivation. Empathic reflection starts with a focus on the heart, or the positive intent behind every action and every expression. The beauty of this part of the process is that we transform judgment into awareness of the positive intent. In this way, we create an environment of acceptance, where every part of each person is welcome. Rather than focusing on what the group does not want, we attune to their hopes, dreams and deepest longing. As we identify the needs of the group, we check for shared understanding, which primes the group for action and movement toward collectively honoring and meeting the needs of the group. No matter how repulsed we are by the way they express themselves, we recognize that everything they do or say is an attempt to honor a value. So we identify their motivation and connect with the stirring in their souls. In this phase of the moon, we:

- Listen from the gut and take in people's essence
- Practice self-empathy by giving voice to what's happening right now in the present
- Nurture the scary, freaked out parts, giving them room to breath and come alive
- Hold space for a shift to intimacy as people discover that all parts of themselves are welcome
- Allow everyone to be fully heard, to deepen the understanding of each other's desires

Unify: How do we open to the collective desire for transformation? By creating safe space for people to explore the shadow, they show up, express themselves fully, and connect with their desire to contribute to a better world. We welcome divergent viewpoints and explore how they can co-exist. Often this stage seems mired in frustration, darkness and chaos, but in the shadows of despair, people connect deeply to their own humanity, and recognize their desire to change their inner and outer world. Here we look under the surface, notice what people are busy avoiding, and get people to talk about what really matters. When people start to feel utterly hopeless, or become mired in doubt, if we stay with the process, new possibilities emerge. Even if someone hijacks the group, calls people vile names, or threatens to walk out, underneath the antics, we hold a core belief that every person wants to contribute to the good of the whole. As people are deeply seen, heard and valued, their facades melt and they offer their gifts. Each individual comes to trust that they matter and that they belong. Inclusion does not mean compromise. We continuously sense and intuit what the group needs, and put our attention on what wants to be born. Everyone is activated and tuned into what is emerging because we invite them to put their attention on the heartbeat of the group. In the facilitator role, we:

- Create space for silence to support people in finding their voice
- Stay with the sexy turned on places *and* the dark scary places
- Point to what's wanting to be born or what's emerging now in the spaciousness
- Simultaneously honor the impatience to move forward and the desire to slow down
- Notice how spirit moves through the group – everyone contributes to the magic

Respond: What actions can we take that meet universal needs and move the group forward? It's as simple and as complex as getting people to ask for what they want. We encourage people to offer a proposal, but instead of being attached or rigid, they have an alternative strategy in their back pocket. In this way, they take a stand without getting locked into a position. With our attention on the needs of all,

we tweak the proposals to honor the values of the group. Incorporating every wish can be a daunting task, but as long as everyone knows that their needs matter, they'll open their hearts to what is emerging. Ultimately, the group collectively creates an action plan that identifies who will do what by when. Everyone knows their part in implementing the solution. Not everyone gets their first preference, but the alternative is even sweeter because everyone's ideas, suggestions, and contributions are considered in the outcome. Some are excited; others are more cautious, but the entire group can live with and support the decision to move forward. We ask if anyone has a serious objection, or we can raise the bar by asking if anyone can't live with the plan. The willingness to dialogue and co-create solutions transfers into responsibility during the implementation phase. Everyone shares responsibility and knows their part in enacting the decision. Some are excited; others are more cautious, but every individual owns the outcome and supports the decision to move forward. In this phase we turn compassion into action and support the group to:

- Ask for what they *really* want, without holding back
- Generate inclusive alternatives that synthesize the needs of all the stakeholders
- Weave together requests so that the plan honors everyone's contribution
- Identify sustainable agreements and get clarity about who will do what by when
- Create empowering structures to confirm progress on the plan

Using this model awakens the heart and soul of the group and simultaneously moves people toward personal transformation and social change. Every step of the way we embody both compassion and fierceness. That's how we get people to step into the fire and stay there until the flame of group wisdom burns brightly. Supporting human evolution is challenging, sometimes heart-wrenching work, so it helps to have solid values we can rely on as a foundation.

Core Values of Facilitating with Heart

When it comes to creating a better world, embodying the values of *Facilitating with Heart* is far more important than learning about models, tools, or tricks of the trade. The values which guide this work are:

- Connection: Supporting compassion and understanding
- Choice: Recognizing individual freedom to choose level of commitment in every moment
- Compassion: Translating judgment into understanding, consideration, interdependence
- Transformation: Adapting to change and taking advantage of growth opportunities
- Transparency: Sharing information, observations, and interests openly and caringly
- Learning: Taking risks to cultivate awareness and develop new skills
- Vision: Unleashing passion to create a more desirable future

All of these values sound agreeable enough, but really living these values in the heat of the moment is both a challenge and a beautiful practice. Heart connection – that moment when people shift as they empathically experience each other – is the common denominator that facilitates true transformation. We don't have to agree or be in synch with others, but if we take off the armor and open our hearts, our understanding of each other deepens and creativity is unleashed.

Sometimes the opportunity for heart connection sails right by me, but I can still enjoy capturing the missed opportunities in hindsight. Come with me as I share a story about unexpected learning and transformation through heart connection.

When I volunteered to spend three days in a maximum security prison as part of the Alternatives to Violence Project, I expected to be searched by the guards before entering, but didn't know how much soul searching I'd be doing myself. I started out listening a lot, but revealed very little about myself. Sure, deep empathic listening is vital, but somehow I'd forgotten that mutual disclosure is a key ingredient in creating heart connection. Worse, I had very little understanding of the inner world of a prisoner. I was completely oblivious to the powerlessness it would evoke, when we offered them the opportunity to do a role play:

Imagine your girlfriend comes to visit you, and she flirts with another prisoner. How do you handle it nonviolently?

Every one of them looked at the floor and would not speak. Reluctantly a few people mumbled, "No way."

"Don't expect me to do that."

"Walk away. Only thing you can do."

"I wouldn't have nothin' to do with that ho."

In smaller breakout groups the men spoke more freely. Jules, the guy with low-slung pants and a steely gaze, said, "It depends how many people saw it. If a lot of people saw it..." He shook his head. "Well I wouldn't do nothin' right then. But when I get out, I would find her mother. I would shake da bed with her mother and if her grandmother isn't too old, I'd get her too."

I was rattled. So I asked a stalling, clarifying question, "You're talking about when your girlfriend winks at another guy, something like that?"

"Yeah. You don't know what it's like in here! Your girlfriend flirts with another guy, and you let that happen... that could get you killed. Know what I'm saying? If your girlfriend don't respect you, you got nothing. It's all about staying alive in here."

I started to get an inkling of what Jules was talking about. I couldn't quite imagine the extent of the powerlessness or how he coped with it. So I connected with his desire for respect, but I still didn't get it about going after the mother and grandmother. So I asked him, "is that about wanting to get your power back?"

He gave me the unmistakable look reserved for fools. "No. I got all the power I need. It's about making sure she know her whole family is hos. I want her to think about what I would have to *do* to make that happen. Know what I'm saying?"

Actually I didn't. What could that possibly do for him? To me this sounded like a need for shared understanding of suffering, and underneath that a need for dignity, but from my perspective, a crazy way to try to get it. Clueless, I could only guess his motives, "You want her to know how her flirting brings about suffering and loss of dignity?" He took that in, but I could see my words were a bit off the mark, until I used *his* words. "Oh, you want her to really understand what it's like for you in here."

"Yeah. Yeah. That's it."

He talked to me a few more times over the three days, each time deepening my understanding of what motivated him. I didn't dare tell him that I thought flirting was fun. Playful. Harmless. But finally I did anyway - something about his openness inspired me to reveal myself. I went on to say, "The second someone walks in the room, I know if I'm attracted. I could try to pretend otherwise, but what's the point? One way or another if I'm attracted to someone, any idiot can tell. For me, it's about being real." I could see from the glimmer in his eyes he could connect however slightly with my desire to be real. That's when the heart connection became *mutual*.

Everything shifted when I shared with the group something from my inner world:

"You all might think I'm here because I'm a do-gooder who wants to come in here and fix you. But I'm really here to work on my own tendency toward violence. When someone I love was tortured (tears), she went from a vibrant young girl full of life, to someone who couldn't get out of bed in the morning, and all I could do was fantasize about using a baseball bat on the animal who had hurt her. That's when I realized I wasn't very different from him. Or from any of you. I'm here because I want to understand and overcome my own violence."

They were struck silent when I told them I'm still heartbroken that I hadn't protected her, and cheered when I told them she has recovered - more than getting out of bed, she is getting married soon. They gave me their trust when I gave them mine. Our mutual trust opened up a healing process - giving voice to the desire to relieve the suffering their crimes had caused, and to let the victim's families know about their remorse.

On the third day, Jules opened up and talked about himself as a leader of men. I had a slight suspicion that he was talking about leading a gang, but I listened openly to his desire to lead young men out of poverty, out of low self-esteem, out of a dull despair, and into a life filled with possibilities. As I encouraged him to expand his vision, his dream of helping young men and protecting them from violence touched us all.

During our closing circle, the men shared from their hearts. One guy said, "Martha is like a mother to me, and I haven't felt anything like that in a long time." I was shocked to see several people tearing up, which I thought would be interpreted as

cowardly, but they were deeply moved and respectful of each other's openness. Another sang a heart-wrenching song. Gospel. His vibrant energy turned the place into a church. But the ultimate compliment came from an intense guy who got right in my face to say, "Real knows real."

This experience gave me a glimpse of the possibilities that emerge from being open-hearted, real, and willing to work on myself. I was transformed by their willingness to be real with me and Jules was transformed by my belief in his dream. My vulnerability helps me support the growth of individuals and groups, which in turn opens the door to development of organizations and society. Even the corrections officer was moved. As he escorted us to lunch on day one I asked what it was like for him to observe from the back of the room. He responded with a dismissive wave of his hand, "I've seen it all before. You can't change these guys. I don't even listen." I connected with his hopelessness about having an impact on inmates. Over the three days he became more and more attentive, and on the last day he gave us suggestions about coming more often – which programs would be well-received, who to talk to, and what to say. In some small way he'd accepted us, empathized with our desire to create growth opportunities, and wanted to support the work. There's a special tenderness I feel for all the participants who bring tough but *real* challenges that push me out of my comfort zone, inspiring me to experiment in new realms of chaos and creativity. Before we get into extreme situations, let's challenge some old viewpoints about facilitating.

Debunking Myths about Facilitating

Facilitating is the art of helping people realize their full potential. Instead of telling people what to do, we help them deepen their awareness and create their own solutions. Rather than giving advice, we empower people to expand and realize their dreams. We do this by believing in people and activating their talents, rather than trying to fix them or tell them what to do. Most advice is ignored anyway, not just because it's bad advice, but because it doesn't honor the inherent wisdom of the people we advise.

We facilitators come from diverse backgrounds and use radically different methodologies, but draw amazingly similar conclusions about what works and what doesn't. The field of facilitation has grown quickly, giving rise to some common misperceptions. Some myths about facilitation are widely held but don't hold up under scrutiny:

- *Better decisions are based on facts rather than feelings*—if you avoid talking about feelings, the *real* meeting happens out in the hallway afterward. Feelings are the portal to what really matters to the group, even when expressed by only one person.
- *Consensus is too time-consuming*—for important decisions, where you need commitment from the whole group to move forward, getting buy-in from the whole group saves time in the long run because implementing the decision takes far less time.
- *When things get too intense, take a break*—when people express intense emotions, they're giving you a gift, letting you know that they're touching on something very important. Taking a break diffuses the tension, but you miss the opportunity to discover what's really going on.

- *The facilitator should stay calm and neutral, even if personally attacked*—if a participant yells in your face and you pretend to be calm and neutral, you’ll be perceived as inauthentic or closed off from your emotions. Instead, match their intensity, not by judging them or negating what was said, but by empathizing fully with their passion and sharing your own response.
- *Difficult people can sabotage the meeting and they need to be stopped*—seeing some people as “difficult” creates a sense of separation when they merely want to be heard.
- *Facilitators don’t get emotionally involved*— if you shut down your emotions, the rest of the group will also retreat, and you’ll miss rich opportunities for connection and transformation.
- *Facilitators shouldn’t take sides* – Instead of taking sides with *one* person, you can be on the side of *each* person, by fully understanding their experience, their feelings and their passion.
- *Don’t intervene when your co-facilitator is working with the group because you’ll make her look incompetent*— co-facilitation can be a beautiful dance that starts with two people in synch with each other, moving as one body, speaking with one voice.
- *Facilitators can’t resolve international conflicts when they struggle to create peace in their own families.* Facilitation is a continuous learning process that includes working on internal conflicts and family conflicts, which supports you in facilitating groups, organizations and social change. If you transparently share your personal struggles, you’ll give others the courage to do the same, so that everyone learns from each other.

Now that we’ve explored some of the ways we break from traditional facilitation, let’s look at some of the practices that inform and influence the best practices in the field.

Favorite Practices

I’ve learned about facilitating transformation from multiple modalities and cherish three of my favorite practices: Nonviolent Communication, Coaching, and Organization Development. In the spirit of gratitude and authenticity I want to share what I love about each practice, along with what drives me crazy.

Nonviolent Communication, developed by Marshall Rosenberg², has been the most liberating practice of my life and here’s a short list of the things I most value:

- Empathic heart connection deepens intimacy
- Attentiveness to feelings and needs creates new awareness
- Loving consciousness builds awareness that everyone’s needs matter
- Spaciousness for judgment opens the door to transformation and compassion
- Being seen, heard, and understood creates opportunities for transformation
- Making requests without attachment to strategies opens new possibilities
- Commitment to spiritual development and social change becomes a way of life

² Rosenberg, M. (2003). *Nonviolent Communication: A language of life*. Puddle Dancer Press.

This heart-opening practice also brings some challenges. It took me years to become fluent in the language of compassion, because I had to change the way I was hard wired. Every minute was well spent, but I'd like to find new ways for people to learn NVC consciousness more quickly so that heart connection spreads more rapidly. Even worse than the time it takes to learn, when newcomers overuse the jargon it sound like someone singing out of tune or one of those robo-call messaging systems. I want more originality and spontaneity so that compassionate consciousness has broader appeal across demographics. Another area that troubles me is the practice of offering empathy relies so heavily on the facilitator. Instead of doing the work *for* people, we can hold space for the speaker to self-empathize, by asking them what they feel and need, rather than making our own guesses.

Although NVC is a tool for resolving conflict, when we start the process by looking at what isn't going well, we continue to look for additional problems to solve. However if we point our toes in the direction of creating what we want, I'm more hopeful about creating both personal and social change. Many NVC trainers are moving away from the energy of "unmet" needs and focusing on the energetic quality of the pure need, so I'm hopeful about this development. Lastly, as a community of practitioners, our emphasis on empathizing with others overshadows honest expression of our own needs; I want communion with people who value authentic expression and practice it as rigorously as we practice compassion for others.

Coaching has radically changed my perspective. As the author of my own life, I make choices from the heart and I focus on what I want to create. Thomas Leonard is often considered the father of personal coaching. He wrote six books on coaching and founded Coach University and Coachville.³ The beauty of coaching permeates my life and other's lives in many ways:

- Asking empowering questions calls forth both wisdom and action
- Taking responsibility for creating our future awakens new opportunities
- Trusting in resourcefulness and willful choice creates a balanced, fulfilling life
- Sharing power fosters creativity and intentional relationships
- Articulating intentions and desires transforms them into action
- Identifying values of balance and wholeness helps people create lives they love
- Using simple coaching models leads to fast learning and wide dissemination

As much as I cherish the practice of coaching, I have a few challenges. As coaches, we often lead clients into action. I'd like to see coaches offer more spaciousness for clients to develop a deep awareness of emotions and needs and allow action to naturally emerge from that tender place of conscious choice and desire to shift. The other issue I'm concerned about is that as a profession, the emphasis on making money both helps us and hurts us. To prosper as a coach often means catering to the elite, which means people at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, those who need it most, don't have access. On the other hand, a thriving coaching practice gives us the freedom to do pro bono work and spread coaching more rapidly.

³ Thomas Leonard authored six books on coaching and founded coachville.com.

Organization Development continues to deepen my belief in humanity as I facilitate systemic change. I cherish my work in organizations where we develop the capacity to improve interpersonal and group processes, enhance decision-making, develop shared leadership, transform conflict, and facilitate action learning. Applied Behavioral Science has evolved since Kurt Lewin co-founded the National Training Lab Institute⁴, when the focus was on sensitivity training, but still supports me in being more present and available to myself and others. Appreciative Inquiry⁵, a strengths-based approach to systemic change, is an exciting process that gets people fully engaged in improving organizational performance and building capacity. I'm especially grateful for the practices of:

- Engaging in discovery, dream, design, and delivery to awaken passion for social change
- Building awareness of authority, power, and group dynamics to create sustainable relationships
- Recognizing that each group member is *responsible* for what happens which fosters ownership
- Immersion in chaos and trust in the process which allows for openness to a new kind of order
- Receiving continuous feedback on impact which invites behavioral change
- Community building leverages support systems that contribute to human evolution

I'm especially appreciative of all my friends at the Indian Society for Applied Behavioral Science (ISABS) for helping me to trust working in the here and now. My greatest concern with organization development is the emphasis on diagnosis and labels which evoke judgments that disconnect us from our innate compassionate nature. The learning structure often creates “power-over” dynamics between consultants and clients, which is valuable for understanding the power dynamics, but I'm seeking more creativity in creating the dynamics that empower everyone.

Integration

Separately each of these practices are inspirational, but taken together, the synergy leads to deeper transformation. This book builds on the inspirational practices from the three traditions of Nonviolent Communication, coaching and organization development. Many of the teachings are imbedded in my heart and interwoven throughout the book. The awe, the wonder, and the challenges of each practice point me toward my desire to integrate multiple modalities so that we can develop new practices and co-create opportunities for radical change.

Interview Process

I'm grateful that many facilitators, coaches, and social change activists readily agreed to talk about their work. Working with Lynda Smith Cowan, we interviewed 50 people we admired. To start, we created a list of interview questions designed to gather stories about transformational facilitation experiences, but the process itself transformed quickly – we changed the interview questions, tossed

⁴ National Training Labs. <http://www.ntl.org>

⁵ Appreciative Inquiry Commons. <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

them out, and went with the flow. As people described a transformational experience, I heard them saying things like, “I’m just realizing this now... or I’d never thought about it like this before.”

The interviews themselves became transformational when I acted less like a journalist, and more like a peer. The dialogues became richer as we explored what’s so intriguing about our work, and what’s next for them in terms of their own growth. When I asked people what they loved about their own facilitation style, that really opened the kimono. I had a frustrating experience during one interview because I was attached to getting a story out of her. She kept talking in generalities, even when I asked for specific examples. When I finally let go of my strategy, and opened my heart to hearing whatever she wanted to say, however she wanted to say it, she popped. She described how she consciously "puts her arms around the room," holding the group and every person. I got into the flow by saying, “I’m going to do that right now with you – I’m putting my arms around you.” She really opened up and told a moving story about how she transformed her terror – I never would have guessed that she ever felt sheer terror when facilitating groups.

Instead of treating the interviewees like experts, instead of separating myself from them, I became involved in the process and started sharing my reactions and how I’m challenged and inspired. Likewise, as I embodied the very facilitation skills as they described them, our conversations deepened and shifts happened.

Overview

Now that we’ve taken a look at what makes facilitating with heart special, shared the core values, shattered a few myths, told a personal story, and looked at an overview of some of the practices that influence the work, we’re going to step into the field of facilitating deep change. I’ve set the book up the same way I’d set up a workshop, sequencing each step to build on the last. So in chapter 2 we’ll look at setting the tone, inviting people into the sacred space of transformation. In chapter 3 we’ll review many facilitation skills so that we can scope out the big picture and gain some early confidence. In chapter 4 we go right into the essence of the work, intimately connecting with the body, feelings and needs. Chapter 5 is all about movement, progress, and action, dealing with resistance and creating support. In Chapter 6 we hone the art of making requests and experiment with several decision-making models. Then we go deeper into heart connection, exploring coaching techniques and healing in chapter 7. In chapter 8 we’ll compare several facilitation models, from traditional to evolutionary. Chapters 9-12 are all about the inner work of the facilitator including presence, authenticity, feedback and personal transformation. In chapter 13 we look at how we design the facilitation process. In the next three chapters 14-16, we’ll get into organization development, social change and the business of transformation. The last section is full of resources to support our work as facilitators.

At the end of each chapter you’ll have an opportunity to absorb the content by doing some field work. I invite you to journal or sit with the reflection questions, explore the discussion topics with your peers and experiment with the activities to enhance your awareness, personalize your learning and translate knowledge into action.

Exercises

Reflections:

1. What “mistakes” have you made as a facilitator?
2. How can you celebrate what you learned?

Small Group Discussions:

1. What strongly-held beliefs do you hold about facilitating groups?
2. What are your core values that serve you as a facilitator?

Activities:

1. List some of your favorite practices and brainstorm ways you can integrate them in your practice as a facilitator.
2. Create your own personalized facilitation model.