

August 15, 2015

I'm remembering the last time I was at a big event making a speech. It was Phillips' 35th Anniversary, 2006, and they gave me the Chris Varnes Legacy Award. (Who here remembers Chris Varnes?) She was my teacher, my therapist, then my boss. (We didn't worry about multiple relationships then. It was the '70s.) She essentially created our MFT curriculum and integrated delivery system. I got the legacy award because I was viewed as the torch-bearer, the protector of what she created.

If we were giving a legacy award today, it would go not just to me, but to the entire MFT faculty. We have all maintained the legacy. We have all worked together to create this amazing, transformative experience for students. And we haven't just preserved a legacy, which of course would be deadly, just locking in the old stuff. We have adapted and grown through all sorts of changes, both dramatic and gradual.

So what is the essence of the MFT program, what's that legacy that's passing to you? We have all tried to label it over the years. Shout it out, you guys--Experiential learning, relational responsibility, systemic thinking, non-hierarchical, genuine, Passion, commitment...

I'm going to try to capture the essence one more time, using a motto from my elementary school days at Francis Parker School in Chicago. Almost every day in the auditorium. I saw a quote from progressive educator John Dewey. My father, who attended the same school, is probably the only person here who will resonate to this quotation for sure. See how you feel about this:

A school should be a model home, a complete community, an embryonic democracy.

I internalized that motto. I believe it's a goal, even for a graduate school, to BE what we are training people to practice. And it is a pretty accurate expression of what Phillips is at its best. We are a family, a community, and at least embryonically a democracy. I will miss our family so much! But we all know our developmental theory. People enter the family system, and they exit. It's stressful, but normal. For me, it's time to move on to the next stage.

People keep asking me about that next stage. What are you going to do? Brief answer: for a while, nothing. (Except I am continuing my exam preparation workshops. Please come. Please refer. And after I get my home office set up, come October, I will be able to see clients and do supervision)

This will be the first time in my life that there is nothing I absolutely have to do. I won't be responsible to an organization. My sons are grown, so I won't need to take care of anyone. Interesting. A little scary.

The purpose of doing nothing for a while is to leave open space for new attachments to develop. I won't jump right in to book clubs and volunteering and travel. Whatever

project draws me, it's got to involve being with people, interacting, being a team. I've never done anything purely for a CAUSE. Bowen would say I'm relatively undifferentiated, motivated not by basic self, but by wanting to please and be close to others, who are on my same side...

And that phrase, on my same side, brings me to my last bullet point. Maybe I should call it a last homework assignment for those who are former students?

It seems to me that whether we're talking about economics, politics, or education, a lot of our models for progress operate like team sports. It's a competition, "Us versus Them." And there's nothing wrong with that model up to a point. But when we wallow in the "we," and demonize the outsider, the other, we get Fox News versus MSNBC, where neither audience can hear the other. We get lawmakers and business leaders who can only think about short term winning while the planet is dying. When the Other loses her humanity for us, we get drone bombings, and racism and legitimizing torture. Nobody wins.

So here's your homework: as you teach, and work with clients, and work with each other, PLEASE, continue to do what we've always done at our best: develop ways to feel connected without being exclusionary or competitive. Pay attention to the ripple effect this way of being can have in the larger world, when we walk our talk. Maybe we can ALL be winners. (BTW, this is my homework, too. I'm going to be writing—maybe a blog titled, "Can there be an US without a THEM?")

There's no due date for this assignment. I do want to hear how this, and all your other projects, are coming along. I've been saying, "Let's keep in touch" all evening. But I really mean it. I will miss you all so much, and I really love you.