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# THE HEALING RELATIONSHIP

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RON KURTZ

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This article appears in the latest versions of the manual, which some may not have available, and represents a shift in emphasis from intrapersonal to interpersonal. It repeats some material found in "On the Uniqueness of Hakomi" in Issue 5 of the Forum, Summer 1987. In it the inner work done by clients is explained as framed by a relationship between the therapist and client. This relationship has great significance and calls upon the highest levels of commitment, integrity and skills the therapist has. Without it, therapy does not work.

## HEALING RELATIONSHIP

All real living is meeting. Meeting is not in time and space, but space and time in meeting.

-- Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

The basic work of health professionals in general, and of psychotherapists in particular, is to become full human beings and to inspire full human-beingness in other people who feel starved about their lives.

-- Chogyam Trungpa, *Becoming A Full Human Being*

In the development of Hakomi, a hierarchy of contexts emerged where each new level served to inform and regulate the levels below.

The level of technique is the lowest. Techniques are tangible and easy to learn. You can learn to deliver a probe in twenty minutes or so. (You won't learn all about probes in twenty minutes, but you can learn to deliver them.) The techniques are very powerful and they work. Students have some immediate success using them and the work is very exciting at this point. Depending on their capacities and interests, students may work at this level for months or, sometimes, years. There is a lot of technique to learn. While learning is still centered on this level, the techniques tend to be overused. In the early stages, students are taking over everything in sight and doing probes at a terrifying rate. The student still fascinated with technique uses a frame of mind that demands an awareness of small details. In that frame of mind, the student is not yet able to sense the larger contexts. The student is searching for opportunities to use the techniques he or she has learned and doesn't yet know much about actively creating those opportunities. With experience, more and more such opportunities are noticed and gradually the problem becomes which ones to chose. Finally, the question of why one technique and not another emerges. So, a combination of mastery and frustration final-

ly motivates a shift in focus, away from techniques themselves to a way to organize the use of techniques in an integrated, systematic fashion. Technique has become habit. The next level emerges: method.

The method, as the next higher level, organizes the use of the techniques. In studying the method, one begins to think about: what character process is this? What system am I in and how should I jump out? What part of the process is this? How do I create an experiment here? How can I get some more information about this or that? When should I do the experiment, what shall I contact? All those are questions about method and process and character. One becomes powerfully aware of the larger aspects of the client as a whole person. For example, the student learns to recognize, contact and work with the child part of the client. This is exciting and the work feels somehow new. At this level, the student learns to do more with less. One uses the techniques sparingly, with much more precision. The student also learns character issues, like those about safety, abandonment, control and freedom, and uses this in the work. The student begins to step back from the moment to moment details and notice larger patterns. These larger patterns: managing consciousness, lowering the noise, gathering information, studying the organization of experience, evocation, working with emotional release, the child, transformation, integration, and so forth, are the concerns of the method.

It takes much longer to master this level. A considerable amount of information must be assimilated and a long time spent studying and practicing. The work becomes a fulltime preoccupation. At this level the work also comes truly alive. It becomes richer and more satisfying, able to meet success with a wider variety of people on ever deeper levels. One can become a very powerful therapist through the method. Still, even the method has it's limits.

After a long time and much practice, we come to have similar feelings about the method. We have learned it to the point where we are feeling its limits. So, we look for a larger context, something beyond the method, just as method is beyond technique. This is

the level of relationship. The method is embedded in the context of the therapist-client relationship. It is this relationship that determines when methods work and when they don't. At this level, the therapist's emotional growth and depth of understanding are crucial. Here we begin to use our full selves, our human-beingness. There is still much at this level that the student needs to learn.

As my personal understanding went from one level to another, the power of each new model to organize ideas and to direct processes increased dramatically. It seems that when a new level is needed, understanding gathers momentum until, rather suddenly, a new organizing principle becomes clear. After I had accumulated so much detail about the method that it became conceptually unwieldy, something quite simple emerged to organize it. What emerged was a vision in which the building of a special relationship with the client takes precedence over all else. This relationship centers on the cooperation of the unconscious. It depends upon two complex

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structures: one, the emotional attitude of the therapist and two, the therapist's understanding of the client's world.

The principles are the highest level of context. As our capacity for relationship matures and becomes a powerful component of the therapy, the principles guide this development.

In Hakomi, the locus of healing and control is not in the therapist or in any external agent like a vitamin or an antibiotic. The locus of healing and control is in the client and in the client-therapist relationship.

First: about efforting. I was leading a workshop at Esalen. The group was split into small groups of four or five. We were doing an exercise that often evokes strong emotions and processing. When things were well underway, I walked around and came to a woman working with expressions of resistance. She was lying down with several people gently restraining her arms and legs. She was pushing her arms and legs against the resistance of the others and pushing out some expressions of "No, I won't." "You can't treat me this way." Things like that. Another group member, a woman who had studied bioenergetics for several years, was acting as therapist. This person was holding the strugglers arms at the wrists. With each movement or spoken expression, the therapist would say, "Good!" "Good!" As soon as I saw this, I wasn't happy. I didn't know why exactly, but, for me, something was wrong.

I sat down beside this little group and looked at the therapist. I told her that I would like to take over at this point and I invited her to watch my approach. She was agreeable to that. I didn't know what I was going to do; I only knew I didn't like what was going on. As I've thought about it since, I realized I didn't like the efforting. I didn't like the sense I got of the client working at expression, pushing for it, struggling. I didn't like seeing the therapist controlling the process and encouraging the efforting. I like to see the spontaneous happening.

Effort is an ego function. When one efforts, the act of efforting creates an I and a something the I struggles against. In this drama of struggle and competition, the chief act is the creation of a separate self: an ego. Without the struggle there is no drama and no dramatis personae. With the spontaneous, effort evaporates and ego relaxes. This relaxation is essential for contact with the healing realms which are beyond the knowledge and control OF the ego. In Hakomi,

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we work deliberately for the support of the larger selves of both therapist and client. Our way of working recognizes the locus of control and healing as something very different from the therapist or even the limited conscious ego of the client.

Our present cultural myth is too much a celebration of the ego. Our notions of separate self are out of balance with all sorts of larger selves: family, community, the biological world and beyond to the universe and God. All too easily, we feel ourselves to be separate from and not much supported by these larger selves. It is upon this fundamental image of isolation and struggle that we build identities, world pictures and psychotherapeutic methods.

So, I asked the "client" to slow down and relax for a moment and with only a little reluctance she did that. I asked her to go inside and find what wants to happen. What movement wants to happen? What expression? What resistance from those holding her would feel exactly right. This one question shifts the locus of control from the therapist to some unnamed intelligence inside the client. I didn't ask her what "she" wants, just "what" wants. I'm asking her to contact some larger self within. Everything about this intervention asks for a relaxation of effort. It asks rather for turning inward and awareness. This is my way of doing things.

She began to adjust. She felt better with the legs and arms going more slowly. As I supported this process, she became clearer and clearer that, at the level of bodily wants, these movements were the "right" ones. The movements felt good. At that point I encouraged her to stay with them as long as they felt that way and to wait for anything else that wanted to happen. The next step, after getting the feeling right, I imagined might be curiosity. I thought she might begin wondering, "why do these particular movements feel so good?" So, I was just sitting there and she was having a very pleasant time, playing you might say. Her expressions seemed to have a quality of delicious and righteous rebellion. These movements felt good. I wasn't directing her movements or even encouraging one over another. I had simply directed a shift from the external reinforcements of the therapist to the internal authority of her own feelings.

Sure enough, she started to get curious. This happens quite spontaneously. We all want to understand. The significant thing here is that the need for understanding emerges after the experience, not before. To search for understanding without a feelingful, present experience is guesswork and tends more to substitute for feelings rather than make sense of them. So, in Hakomi, we establish present experience as our focus, support feelings and expression and only then go for meaning. So, when her curiosity emerged, I asked some questions about meaning: what type of movements were these? What was her body saying? What words go with this experience?

Well, she quite suddenly remembered: they had never allowed her to crawl. That's exactly what those movements looked like -- crawling. It all made sense now. It was about her right to her own body. From that point on I worked with helping her take in the knowledge that she didn't always have to fight for her freedom. I told her it was okay to crawl, that no one would interfere. Someone might even help. She could get support for what she wanted and needed. She wouldn't always be fighting bigger, stronger people -- and losing. It turned out well. She could see herself dropping that whole drama of fighting people for the freedom that was now simply hers to own.

If you followed the broad flow of the process here, you will have gathered that it starts with support for mindfulness, with helping the person relax and turn inward towards present experience. The fundamental activity here is self study -- less doing, more openness. Then, we make ready for, contact, welcome and nurture some naturally unfolding growth process. Such processes, hap

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-pen spontaneously and are a clear sign that the unconscious is cooperating, that the larger self is participating. This backing off and letting things happen is essential for healing and the cooperation of the unconscious. It is a cardinal example of non-violence at its most effective.

The goal and primary result of establishing a successful relationship is the cooperation of the client at an unconscious level. The client slips into an easy working relationship, without needing to resist the therapist in any way. The therapist has established herself or himself as non-threatening and understanding of the client's experiences. Without the cooperation of the unconscious, the therapy process moves very slowly, if at all. The method doesn't work. The client very automatically and unconsciously slows down the process. It is correct to call this slowing down resistance, but it is justified resistance. The therapist is not being sensitive to something the client needs, something about safety or being understood. It is an all too common error to proceed without the cooperation of the unconscious, to introduce therapeutic method before the relationship is firmly established.

The unconscious has great power to make things happen. Pat Ogden, one of the senior Hakomi Trainers, was doing an exercise on the child in one of her workshops. The exercise was to go back to a memory from childhood and gather details about it. Pat had worked hard to establish safety in the class. She had shown her caring and sensitivity and her openness to the conscious and unconscious needs of the individual class members. During the exercise, one woman was remembering a time when her father had taken her to the golf course with him. At one point, he hit a ball off the tee and it accidentally struck the little girl in the nose. As she remembered this in Pat's class, her nose began to bleed profusely.

When the therapist has the cooperation of the unconscious, the process moves smooth-

ly along, without effort. He or she uses techniques and methods much more sparingly. The establishment of relationship and cooperation is prior to the method and it is what makes the method effective. The maintenance of good relationship takes precedence over anything else that's happening within the process. When the client is giving signals that indicate that the unconscious is beginning to resist, it is wise to start thinking and working on the relationship again.

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Basic to the cooperation of the unconscious is the ability to relate to it directly. This involves both reading the signs which tell about unconscious beliefs, attitudes and present experience and the ability to respond to those signs appropriately. These skills are usually learned through years of therapeutic practice. They depend quite heavily upon two aspects of the therapist which mature over time: (1) the therapist's emotional attitude and (2) the therapist's understanding, experience and wisdom.

The unconscious speaks through mood, feeling, posture, tone of voice, pace, facial expression, resistance and cooperation. Here is a short list of some of the signs of cooperation and how the therapist earns it, and resistance and how the therapist evokes it.

Cooperation and how it is earned:

1. thoughtful answers to the therapist's questions; earned by: asking questions that are useful, of immediate interest to the client (rather than just the therapist) and not simply ways to hide or keep busy or because one believes it's the therapist's role to figure the client out...
2. attention to and consideration of the therapist's statements; earned by: the same consideration and attention given to the client, shown by track-

ing and contacting both the content of the client's statements and the implications and experiences described and evoked...

3. a concentrated attention to the present interaction; earned by: attention to the present, ability to stay with the present even when the client drifts off into memories, speculation or generalizations...

4. interactions that reflect inclusion of the therapist in the client's process; earned by: an awareness of that process and a willingness to give priority to the client's needs and direction, that is, to drop one's own agenda in favor of the client's when this is evoking resistance

5. a willingness to give serious consideration to the therapist's suggestions; earned by: the ability to judge when and how to take charge and the resources to make good use of being in charge...

6. a general faith and willingness to cooperate; earned by: the ability to read the signs of unconscious communication...

Signs of resistance and how it is evoked by the therapist:

7. the client slows the process down, not answering questions, not taking suggestions seriously; evoked by: misreading the signs, not giving the client the time he or she needs to just think...

8. the client takes off on his or her own directions without connecting with the therapist first; evoked by: not taking charge at the appropriate times; not being clear about what the therapist is experiencing when he or she is unhappy with the way things are going; not jumping out of the system soon enough...

Good therapy has a feel to it. It feels easy and right. There's movement from superficial to deeper levels of interest, curiosity, feeling and insight. There is also spontaneity. New and often surprising things happen. There are discoveries. There are times of being stuck, times of fear and despair, but the general feeling is one of movement, progress. All the signs of unconscious cooperation are there. When the unconscious cooperates, significant material emerges. In a good session, client and therapist both participate fully, each allowing the other an important place in the work. The flavor is one of mutuality and something happening.

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When therapy is successful, things change. Feelings arise and are expressed. The client relives and resolves painful memories. The client feels forgiveness and the connection to others and to self deepens. Old patterns are revised. New, more effective and satisfying patterns emerge. The motive forces which energize and direct these changes originate within the client. They are natural and spontaneous growth processes, processes which have had a difficult time maturing. Something has been interrupting, blocking, frustrating and diverting them. A once powerful need to act differently still prevents their emergence and development, first in the normal growth periods of childhood and later as part of an adapted, general approach to life. The potential for growth is there waiting. Good therapy must not only help the client reawaken that potential, even more important, it must avoid actions which reawakens the need to resist and divert. For that, a warm, accepting emotional attitude of the therapist is essential.

It is an attitude that allows wide acceptance of all that the client is right now. A healing relationship especially includes a good working relationship with the unconscious and potent needs represented by the defenses. Those needs, no matter what stress

and pain they cause the client, are parts of the unconscious and are, within the present belief system, necessary and logical. Acknowledging and honoring the defenses quiets them and makes way for long-buried memories, feelings and impulses to emerge. In working with defenses, we recognize, acknowledge and accept them without judgment. Any other emotional attitude strengthens the need to maintain them and entangles the therapist in the client's conflicts and character systems.

A mature emotional attitude avoids creating resistance and allows stepping back easily from one's agendas. Often the client's usual way of being in an intimate relationship interferes with the smooth operations of the method. The client may not contact feelings easily. The client may not like instructions or normally volunteer information or initiate interactions. The client may ask many questions or always try to please. There are many such patterns. They derive from the rules for living in certain families and may be quite different from the rules the therapist grew up with. An openness to such diversity is crucial.

To establish the cooperation of the unconscious, the therapist must be able to let go of any need to be doing only what he or she wants to do. That's not as easy as it may sound. Our agendas are not always conscious or controllable. This effortless yielding of one's agendas is a sign of great maturity. We like to participate and feel

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effective. We want to do things to help the client. After all, therapy is our job and we like doing it. But when we're into doing, the client is all too easily seen as resisting. We blame our frustrations on the client and think of his or her defenses as something

to be broken through and overcome. From the client's perspective, especially unconsciously, there is something about the therapist they feel compelled to resist. Cooperation of the unconscious is more likely when the client finds nothing in the therapist to resist.

The immature therapist has trouble backing off. Frustration comes easily and is usually answered with more technique and method. Stepping back is letting go of doing things and just taking a look at what's going on. This taking in without immediately needing to do something is the beginning of wisdom and very close to mindfulness. It is the difference between reactions and response.

For example, the therapist doesn't speak every time the client speaks. The therapist waits a few moments before replying to the client. The therapist makes a simple contact statement about the essence of what the client presents and waits patiently to see what the client does with it. These are signs that the therapist is not lost in the details, not caught up in the system. This patience and openness are signs to the client's unconscious that the therapist is not there to impose anything, to force anything. They are signs that the therapist is alert and sensitive to the needs of client and has the right emotional attitude. From the therapists point of view it means creating an ever expanding ability to accept what the client is at any moment and what the client needs to go on.

This emotional attitude of being ready to help and just as ready to back off and wait is a potent sign to the client's unconscious. In *The Potent Self*, Moshe Felden

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-krais names four signs of mature movement: effortlessness is one, lack of any sense of resistance is another and reversibility a third. These are also the signs of a good therapeutic experience for both therapist and

client. (Unimpaired breathing is the fourth sign.) The therapist must be able to reverse at any moment, to back off and wait, to step back and grasp the connections from a larger perspective.

A mature attitude allows the therapist to use what's wrong with a session. If something is keeping the process shallow and unproductive, the process feels strained and uncertain. The connection isn't right. Nothing's happening. Feelings like these are signals. They tell the therapist to slow down, step back and focus on what's wrong. They may not be spoken of with the client necessarily, but they must be consciously, deliberately thought about. For experienced therapists, this is done habitually. Frustration, discontent, boredom, confusion, these are signals. They tell the therapist that he or she has become caught in a system with the client.

Sensing these things and thinking about the systems creating them, is a way of using those feelings without being caught in them. If we notice them and act on quickly, the process doesn't bog down, but gains the added momentum of a natural interest in present feelings and relationships. They may also clarify one's own emotional needs or bring some understanding of the client's world. These things create relationships that works. With too much drive to make something happen and too much attachment to the method, the therapist's tendency will be to ignore such signals, to push them out of consciousness in order to get on with the business of therapy. But they are the business of therapy and the better we use them, the better therapy will go.

For the client, these systems are habits. We use them to keep relationships within safe bounds and in therapy they are operating every moment. The way client and therapist relate is a rich source of information. If the process of therapy isn't going right, attending to that fact can be the most fruitful path to follow. Frustration, for example, may say something about what the therapist is trying to do that the client's unconscious won't allow. Stepping back from an agenda at that point, not only helps get the process unstuck, it helps both client and

therapist to understand how it got stuck in the first place. Cultivating this approach over the long run avoids stuckness and resistance better than anything else I know of. It develops both understanding and a healthier emotional attitude.

Here's a little story about signals: Every morning, a worker crossed the border on his bicycle. One of the guards suspected that the worker was smuggling something. The guard searched the worker every time he crossed, but never found anything. Still, the guard was right. The man was a smuggler. He was smuggling bicycles. If therapy is to go well, we must learn to pick up and use the signals that tell us something is wrong, that we are evoking resistance. Whatever we evoke is directly linked to our own character processes as well as the client's. We're all smugglers, bringing in core material and pain in the guise of everyday things. Listen to the signals that tell you that. Don't push them out of your mind just to get on with therapy. If you sense something is wrong, focus on that sense, understand where it's coming from. Look into and take care of such things. By giving the relationship first priority, the way becomes open to use method and technique. With the cooperation of the unconscious, the process unfolds smoothly, with little effort. The same deep needs that inform character and defense, inform the client-therapist relationship. Therapy begins here, because it must.

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A healing relationship also requires that the therapist have the cooperation of his or her own unconscious, in order to be creative and compassionate. In order to use his or her intuition, the therapist needs to be available to his or her own unconscious and have an excellent working relationship with it.

Learning to read bodies for psychological information is a good example of relating to your own unconscious. There are two

very different approaches to body reading and they reflect two different ways of operating in the world, two different paradigms. One way attempts to be objective and relies on theory, logic and memory. The other includes feelings and personal experience and relies on intuition and direct knowing. When I first learned body reading, I learned both ways. The first is about what each body part can tell us. I learned that by reading books, mostly Alexander Lowen's books. I learned by reading about what the body meant, part by part. This approach is understanding through special knowledge. Some authority gained this special knowledge through hard work, experience and much creative thought. Whoever is learning from the authority studies that knowledge and absorbs it. This way is about taking something in from the outside.

That's the first way I learned. I learned that body structure, posture, the various parts and features, all have meaning, and I just learned those meanings and practiced looking at people with those meanings in mind. It seemed that I needed nothing more. Just memorize the list and understand the reasons for each part meaning what it does and you can read bodies. It was very much like symptom analysis. It was all left brain. There was nothing in there about the unconscious, or the observer, nothing about state of consciousness or feelings. It's a list. In theory, anyone could learn it and use it. There was nothing about intentions or relationship or special talents.

I learned a second way to read bodies by studying a little while directly with John Pierrakos. Pierrakos is famous for reading bodies (auras, too). I made photographic slides of my clients and I'd bring them to John's place in the country to show to him. We'd sit together, I'd show a slide and he'd comment. He'd say things like, "the pools of stagnation." This wasn't from any list that I knew of. This was John's unconscious speaking. He would open to and resonate with the person on the screen. The deepest issues and emotional history spoke to John. I knew these people. I knew them from long hours in therapy. I knew that something in John, something intuitive, was connecting. That was his way. Just watching him, I learned.

He taught me that there was more to knowing than parts from a list. He had learned to see people directly. He could have made a parts list anytime he wanted. He didn't need one.

John's work wasn't about special knowledge but rather a special connection to his own unconscious gifts. He had developed something there inside him. Anyone can learn to do the kinds of things John can do. (Not as good perhaps, but still, far beyond what most people know about.) In order to develop our own gifts, we have to connect with parts of our minds we are not usually conscious of. We have to learn a whole new way to be with ourselves and others, and, especially, ourselves.

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This new way of being and working with each other invites the participation of the unconscious. A different way of learning creates these skills, of which body reading is only a very minor one. A cultivated, inner wisdom then informs your work. It tells you how fast or slow to go, when to speak, when to remain silent. It guides the healing process. It builds not just your skills, but a healthy, loving way of being.

A few more words about connecting to your own unconscious: How is it that John Pierrakos can do these things and you can't? Why is this natural ability not operative for you, right now? Is it something that you failed to develop, or something the parenting figures talked you out of? Was there something wrong with it? When I explore these issues with students, we find cultural and family taboos about genuinely knowing, seeing and being with each other. There are family styles which discourage honesty, intuition and directness.

There is a cultural bias which leads us to neglect and subvert our intuitive talents. Perhaps you once knew how and you put it a-

side, accepting the taboos against it and the general suspicions and low opinions of it. Perhaps you learned a whole other way of doing things, an active, physical way, full of competition and effort and clever argument. Or maybe, without much support, you just didn't know how.

In trying to connect with themselves and others, most people simply try too hard. If they have a little trouble at first, they become confused and frustrated and they begin to effort and struggle. They seem to be say

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-ing to themselves, I should be able to do this. If I just try hard enough, I will be able to do it. It's as if they were lifting weights. It's as if minds had no reality or influence and all reality was ponderous material. Instead of relaxing and waiting, seeing where the process wants to go, they take charge and try to steer the process too strongly. The client's unconscious is very likely to be sensitive to force. Most people have worked hard for the freedom and autonomy they enjoy. They balk when someone challenges or threatens these. Then, they may go through the motions, participating in what looks like therapy but is only an empty ritual. Unconsciously, cooperation has ceased.

The same will happen if you try to force your own unconscious. When the work isn't playful and spontaneous, it won't be creative. The unconscious will stop participating. When it is playful and open and fresh, when you put aside the struggle to be right or in charge, when you embrace the process as a gift, gratefully, willing to learn from it, okay that it isn't all explainable, when you are willing to begin simply, with what is there in the client and in yourself, when you are available to the full range of experience, joy, pain, fear, courage, love, hate, all this, then it will be easy, full of sur-

prises and delight, and full of heartfelt moments.

Understanding: Finally, let's talk about understanding, the other essential ingredient needed to gain the cooperation of the unconscious. In my experience the unconscious appreciates it when the therapist knows what's going on. It is much easier to gain cooperation if you can show that you understand the immediate situation and can make very intelligent, logical conclusions about the client's past. When you combine this ability to understand what the client is experiencing with a warm, accepting attitude, the unconscious is most likely to trust you and to cooperate with you. A good part of the beginning of therapy is spent gaining and showing understanding.

In its full ripeness this understanding is wisdom and comes from years of deep interest in people, how they get to be who and what they are, and what changes them. It comes from a passion for the truth about ourselves and others. In a different language entirely it comes from a large, well integrated, easily accessed data base. You must know a lot about people and have that knowing put together and ready to use. It comes from self-knowledge too, because we need clarity to separate our stuff from the client's.

Like most effective systems understanding and the right emotional attitude are mutually supportive; each sustains and enhances the other. To create cooperation, it takes both. And effort is no substitute.

