



**Hello from the Open Grove!** Winter continues in the Open Grove. After a few warmer days, it's currently snowing outside. As the snow falls, our grove silently awaits spring. How is everything in your Grove?

Valentine's Day brings ideas of love and longing. Florists send thousands of arrangements. Restaurants fill to the brim with couples celebrating the day of love. Jewelry stores sell shiny diamond rings and beautiful things. Love fills the air. Yet after the love, excitement, great food, and beautiful jewelry comes the relationship. This Open Grove Newsletter focuses on relationships.

### **The human condition**

Human beings live in a delicate balance between ferocious independence and a deep need to be connected to other people. In the United States, we tend to support and enhance people's independence while diminishing our interdependence. Life can be a confusing mess of "I need people" and "I don't need people". And people are lonely.

Romantic relationships become complicated with the desire to maintain a separate identity and the desire to be known by another person. Women adamantly state that they will not become a "1950s housewife" while men express that they will not be dominated by a woman. Same gender relationships are also complicated by the desire for independence. Still we want to have deep connections in our lives.

### **Bridging the gap**

It is possible to have the connection you long for without giving up your sense of individuality. Here are a few ideas that will help you bridge the gap.

- Get clear. Prior to beginning a relationship, you must spend some time determining what you want in a relationship. It is important to determine where you are willing to compromise and what would be a "deal breaker". This allows you to communicate with someone else what is important to you.
- Get curious. Spend some time watching other people's relationships. What do you like and dislike about the relationships that you see? Spend time thinking about your parent's relationship. What did you like and dislike about that relationship? Get curious about what the relationships you admire. How do they make it work?
- Get focused. What is your relationship style? Look at your friendships and your relationships with your siblings. Do you tend to be the caretaker? The person who cheers everyone up (mascot)? Or the leader? Are you and your needs invisible to others? Write about each relationship. You will most likely play the same role in every relationship. This is the role you will play in your intimate relationships. Do you like it? If not, spend some time understanding why you play that role and making the changes necessary to do something different. You do have a choice!

When you know what you are looking for, you are ready to begin looking for a relationship.

## Your most important relationship

There is no question about it. Your most important relationship is with yourself. Getting to know yourself is a life long endeavor. There are no short cuts. If you feel disconnected from yourself, and that there is very little “you” in your life, it is time to begin the journey toward knowing yourself. It’s time to simply start. The easiest way to begin this journey is through journal writing. Keeping a journal of your thoughts, dreams and interactions allows you to begin to keep track of your thoughts and feelings. It doesn’t matter whether you write into a computer or write into a beautiful journal with a special pen, the simple act of writing your thoughts allows you to begin a relationship with yourself. Try it. It will change the way you relate to yourself.

## A new relationship

In the flush and excitement of a new relationship, we often forget that we are actually starting a relationship. Whether a friendship or love interest, we rush in without spending time determining if this is relationship that will be healthy. After you know that he or she is interested in you, spend some time watching him or her. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is his relationship with his family? This will directly impact your relationship.
- How are her friendships? She will treat you the same way.
- Who does this person rely upon when they experience trouble? Do you value the person your love interest relies upon?
- How much does he or she drink? Use drugs? Smoke? Watch television?
- What is his or her relationship with money? It might be your money some day.

Before you commit yourself to this person make certain that these few issues are in alignment. Don’t believe that your love interest will change. Change takes a long time and requires a lot of work. If you cannot accept your new love interest as he or she is right now then you must move on.

## Relating

It is true that some people are so good at relationships that they could easily have a relationship with a rock. If you are in a relationship and would like a few pointers on how to make it work better, here’s 5 things that will help make your relationship function better.

1. Pick your battles. Often we are very critical of our partners. We nit and pick at everything they attempt to do. The next time you are irritated at your partner ask yourself, “Is this a battle that really needs to be fought?” What would you gain by winning this argument? Maybe it’s time to let a few unchangeable things go.
2. Appreciate/understanding. John Gray, Ph.D. has a theory that women want to be understood and men want to be appreciated. Men, make an effort this week to empathize with and understand your wife. Women, even if he’s doing “what he’s supposed to”, appreciate your husband this week. You will be amazed at the result!
3. Watch your tongue. Sometimes we say awful things to the people we love the most. Caught up in our emotions, we just let out tongues loose. A loose tongue can destroy a relationship. If you are looking for an impact, try something else. The wounds you leave with your words, even if they seem invisible, are deep, damaging and totally unnecessary.
4. Listen first, then respond. It sounds basic yet most people defend first, then respond. Listening means that you focus on what the other person is saying without turning their words into something about you. After you have heard what someone else has to say, then respond. And don’t respond before you have heard what the other person has to say. Don’t know how to listen? Practice listening to other people’s conversations and notice if they are listening before responding.

5. Don't take it so seriously. Successful relationships are filled with laughter. As soon as you begin to take your relationship too seriously, you are bound to struggle. Relationships are supposed to be fun. Laugh at yourself. Laugh at your partner. Your laughter will give your relationship a breath of fresh air.

### **The relationship you cannot change**

Sometimes we are involved in relationships that we can neither end nor change. It might be with an in-law or maybe your child's partner's parents. It could even be with a sibling or a neighbor. We sometimes are involved in painful, difficult relationships. The fact of the matter is that regardless of the adjustments we make to our attitude, the relationship remains painful and difficult.

How do we manage those difficult relationships? First, acknowledge in your heart, mind, body and soul that you simply cannot change this relationship. You might reflect on the efforts you have made in the past to heal this relationship. Forgive yourself for your human desire to make things better and your human inability to be able to change what won't to change.

Then focus on what you have control over: yourself. What can you do to make yourself feel more comfortable in this relationship? Sometimes it's simply a matter of giving up changing the relationship and the other person. Reflect on each of the situations with this person or people. Make an effort to eliminate situations that are too difficult. For example, if you cannot get along with one of your siblings, make an effort to not spend time alone with them. See them in a group setting or interact with them via email.

### **Under the arbor – Practice section**

Based on your responses to our fall questionnaire, we selected three books to share with you in our practice section, Awake at work by Michael Carroll which will help us incorporate our calm spiritual practice at work, Meditation 24/7 by Camille Maurine and Lorin Roche, Ph.D. designed to instruct us in practices which will create calm recovery in our life, and Intelligent Risking by Barbara Stoker to help us learn to create balance in our lives. We will rotate sections from each of these books throughout the year.

This month, we have chosen the "Cultivate the art of conversation" from Awake at Work by Michael Carroll

#### ***"Cultivate the art of conversation"***

"A common workplace image nowadays is a man or woman staring slack-jawed at a computer, tapping and twitching at the keyboard. Many of us could see ourselves in that picture. Whether we are buried in a newspaper or a computer screen, glancing at a cell phone or watching television, the scene is pretty much the same: a lone person staring at a device and poking at it on occasion. We have quietly grown accustomed to engaging our world as bits of information. We scan printed words and pictures, watch TV newspeople describe life, push buttons to go to digitized landscapes. Such an approach to engaging work – indeed our lives – has become common, at times preferred. But the image of the lone person mesmerized by the computer illustrates a central risk to the modern workplace and should come with a dire warning: Information is addictive and may make you unavailable to reality.

Of course, operating computers and managing information are critical to contributing at work. WE all want to be facile with such things. Information can bring efficiency and scope to our lives, making everything from governments to kindergartens run more effectively. Vast access to information gives us a formidable command of our world. Empowering us to accomplish more in one day than our ancestors could in an entire lifetime. But when we substitute a digital game for

life's rawness, data for genuine communication, and digital dialogue for heart felt human contact, we can cut ourselves off from our world. We anesthetize ourselves, distort our sense of priorities, and become unavailable to others. One way to avoid this numbing quality of today 's technology is to "cultivate the art of conversation".

A good conversation, whether at work or elsewhere, is one of life's great gifts. Whether we are listening to an amusing story unfold or recounting a tender and insightful moment, talking with friends and colleagues can be a great delight. Even in this modern information society, a good conversation continues to be one of the most effective and enjoyable ways to learn. Having a cup of tea with a neurosurgeon will likely yield more insights into spinal cord research than days spent exploring the Web. Talking with a politician can give us a truer measure of where she stands than hours of reading campaign literature. And in the course of such conversations, we run the delightful chance of making a friend.

At work, however, we typically converse in order to get somewhere – to achieve things. So much of our conversation is taken up with deliverables, deadlines, and crises that much of the art of conversation is overlooked. We may be getting somewhere in our conversations, but by not also *being* somewhere, we can miss the graceful role conversations play in promoting a decent, respectful, and creative workplace. Cultivating the art of conversation encourages us to consider our exchanges at work not just as opportunities to be effective and get our job done but also as valuable moments to be considerate, alert, and authentic.

In order to cultivate this art, we can keep in mind the following courtesies of workplace conversations.

#### Notice the Setting

Taking note of our physical surroundings creates space for our conversation: we slow down and appreciate the moment. By noticing where we are, we may choose to have a conversation elsewhere out of earshot of others, straighten up our desk to create a more appealing atmosphere, or simply meet the moment fully alert.

#### Appreciate silence

Conversations are inevitably punctuated with moments of silence. Such pauses can be slightly unnerving, but we can refrain from filling them up. We can pause and respect the moment, letting the situation unfold at its own pace.

#### Stop Talking and Listen

The greatest mistake we can make in a conversation is not to listen. Rambling on, getting through the conversation, repeating our point of view, spacing out, assuming we know what the other person is about to say – in effect trying to *get somewhere fast* – is simply insulting. Much that is communicated at work is not spoken. Our colleagues' tone of voice, body posture, choice of phrases – even the placement of a briefcase or a pen – can offer insights into what is truly being said and what our colleagues truly need. By listening deeply, we are fully available and attentive and invite others to be equally open.

#### Ask Helpful Questions

Conversations are as much about helping others make their points as they are about making our own. Expressing our genuine curiosity with questions and statements that clarify, summarize,

draw parallels, building consensus – generally helping the dialogue take shape and meaning – shows respect for all involved.

### Speak Clearly, Refrain from Harsh Phrases and Jargon

Using profanities and demeaning language at work destroys trust and respect among colleagues. Ironically, using jargon can have the same effect. Saying to a colleague, “Your PC’s installation to the RP real-time constellation network will begin Friday,” rather than, “We’ll be networking your computer this weekend,” creates doubt in our abilities and disregard for our opinions. Speaking clearly and straightforwardly – using an economy of speech when practical moments demand clarity – invites the same in return and is the mark of a clear and present mind.

### Have a sense of humor

Enjoying ourselves in conversation is just plain human. Not taking ourselves too seriously, clearing the air with helpful anecdotes, retelling an instructive story, are all part of the poetry and art of good conversation. We need not to be stand-up comedians, but keeping our dialogue fresh and playful, open to unseen twists and offhand comments, is a way to be vividly present in the midst of work’s constant pace to get things done.

### Appreciate Coincidence

Conversations inevitably lead to unseen possibilities. How many times in a conversation have we said things like “I didn’t know you worked with her at XYZ Company!” or “I’ve contracted for the same services – there is no reason why we can’t coordinate our market research and save some bucks,” or “I’ll be in Boston next week too – why don’t we go on the sales call together?” Conversations yield potentially fruitful coincidences – the natural outcome of the art.

While these suggested courtesies may be helpful, cultivating the art of conversation is far more than a set of rules: it is a profound human capacity for bringing the best out of others and for expressing our own authenticity. Our conversations may preserve the humanity of work in the midst of today’s numbing blizzard of technology, speed and ambition. We can actually take a moment – in fact hundreds of moments a day – to enliven our mutual humanity by noticing and listening to one another. By deliberately being alert and available in our conversations, we show respect toward our colleagues, promoting an atmosphere that cultivates *li* (a social ritual intended to reveal the natural decency and goodness of being human) and inspires trust. Cultivating the art of conversation then becomes an exercise in the joy of balancing effort – being thoroughly present and getting the job done.” – from *Awake at Work* by Michael Carroll. Reprinted with permission from Shambhala Publications.

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### News in the Grove –

- We apologize for the delay in this newsletter. We took the President’s Day weekend off which delayed the release of this newsletter. We apologize for any inconvenience!
- Want to make a difference in the world? Studies show that prayer, meditation, directing energy and/or chanting for an issue can make a difference in that issue. Join “The Spring”, our circle of concern. We are creating a list of concerned people who will dedicate at least 10 minutes to pray, say the loving kindness meditation, send healing or love, or chant for another person, a group of people or place. If you are interested in participating, email [circle@opengrove.com](mailto:circle@opengrove.com) with your name and email address. You will

receive an email once a week with the names of people, places or issues that we have been asked to focus on.

- Amy Astorga achieved her goal of becoming an on-air announcer at a local radio station! Due to conflict of interest issues, she has resigned as a correspondent for the Open Grove. We are very excited for Amy and wish her well! Our "Voices" Segment will return soon with another correspondent.
- Real Self Care Heroes continues! Due to the overwhelming popularity of these segments, we will continue to produce them in 2005. Let us know if you know someone you believe is a "real self care hero"!
- Paul's gone to look for America. Our friend Paul Haffey continues his journey around America. Next month, he will be on spring break in Florida. If you are interested in speaking with Paul during his journey, feel free to email: [paul@opengrove.com](mailto:paul@opengrove.com)

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*Branches of well-being, rooted in Healthy Living*