

Further Transforming Meetings Reflections from Nancy Kline - 16. 12. 08

Back to that amazing Transforming Meetings Day and those wonderful managers.

After the practice meeting that was so inspiring (Reflections Piece (8 Dec 08)), we had only forty minutes in which to do the next application. Everyone needed to get on the road because of the impending snow and the impenetrable motorway traffic. I had agreed to end an hour early. So forty minutes was it.

I told them I had never demonstrated a Time To Think Council in less than an hour and a quarter, especially with a group that large (15). But they were up for being the first ever. And judging from their succinctness and focus in the previous work, I decided that going for a first was a great idea.

I introduced the process and then asked for a volunteer to be the Presenter. One man, let's call him, Jeb, raised his hand immediately. He was a shy person. He had spoken well, but not often, during the day. I was surprised that he was so eager.

He began, 'I know that on this leadership programme this year we all have discovered how hard it is for me to talk about deep things, about my feelings and all. I am quiet, and I just usually get on with things. I like to get things done.' He paused. He looked around at the group, as they all had been practicing throughout the day, making connection because it is connection that helps people in a group think while you speak. 'I think after this morning I know I can say some things.'

'My wife's father has pancreatic cancer. We just found out. My wife is very upset. Our children don't really understand yet. I haven't been able to feel much because I am so worried about her. But I am very fond of my father-in-law, and the children really love him. It just came out of the blue. One minute he was fine and the next he was told he might have only a year to live. He is only 67.'

Jeb paused. I thought he might be going to cry. His face flushed and he breathed out. He continued, 'So that is it. The main thing, the reason I wanted to be in this seat, is that I want to be the best possible support to my wife and family. I want to be a rock. And I don't know how. I have never been through something like this before. It would be almost easier I feel if it were my dad, because I could figure out what I need; but I don't know how to figure out what my wife needs.' He stopped. He looked at me. He nodded. 'That's it,' he said.

'Is there anything more you think, Jeb, or feel, or want to say?'

'Only that it is good to be able to tell you all about this and trust you will understand.'

He stopped again. 'Anything more?' I asked softly.

'No,' he said, 'that's it.'

'And what is the question you would like us to address?' I asked.

'Well, the question I guess is just, "How do you think I can be the best support to my wife and family during this period?'

We did the clarification Round, careful only to ask for questions to clarify the question, not the issue. No one had a question. Everyone was deeply attentive and engaged.

We identified a Scribe and started the Round. The first person took a deep breath. Tears came into his eyes. He, like Jeb, was a man of no extraneous words, and softly spoken. He said, 'I have been through something very like this, Jeb. And I think that the best support you can be to your wife and family is to do everything we have been learning today. You can be with your wife just this way. Then she can think clearly and she will feel comforted. And that would be good to do with any of your family. That's it. Just do what we have done today.'

We continued around the group. Everyone agreed with the first person and added their brief story. Then one person said, 'In addition to being there for your wife in these ways, you can be sure you are there for yourself in these ways, too. You can be sure someone listens to you like this. And you can take time out to have fun. Bowl or go to the pub or something now and then. People who are dying don't want others to stop living. And I for one would like to be there for you. Just say the word, and I will be at the other end of a phone anytime to listen to you as well as you have listened to me today. And I don't even mind if you cry.'

Everyone was wise and clear and brief. Jeb was touched and empowered and relieved by people's thoughts and stories, he said. And at the end of the appreciation Round, he could hardly speak. 'I have never experienced anything like that in my life,' he said to the group at the end. 'Thank you.'

Forty minutes exactly.

As people left they said remarkable things about the unique value and beauty and practicality of the day. 'This is the very, very best course we have had,' one man said. 'There is so much we can use. Starting tomorrow.'

'Starting tonight,' Jeb said from across the room.