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## Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching

### Overview: White Paper by Faith Fuller & Marita Fridjhon, Center for Right Relationship

<http://www.therelationshipcoaches.com>

A system is defined as a set of interacting units with relationships among them. The properties (or behavior) of a system as a whole emerge out of the interaction of the components and players comprising the system.

Organization and executive coaching paradigms currently tend to focus on the individuals within the team even when working within group situations. Just about all interventions in coaching and management are focused on individual performance. While requiring specialized knowledge, this coaching and management paradigm is not particularly responsive to the system that the individual is part of. Focusing on individual work within groups can deprive the team from accessing information and creativity residing within the larger whole.

It is therefore imperative for coaches, organizational development workers, as well as managers, to hold members of a team within the framework of this larger whole. Team members can be pointed to their place within the system, and to the support and solutions the system has to offer the individual. In the past, the team has been conventionally thought of mechanistically, as a whole made up of many discrete and separate parts. In this thinking, if a part is broken it must be repaired or replaced. But the theory and reality of living systems is different. Individuals within a system are interconnected. They grow and change in response to the environment they are in. In other words, individuals are not the “problem” or the “star” in the system, they are a reflection of some aspect of the system as a whole. The individual is creating the system; the system is creating the individual. The job of the systems coach is to keep a soft focus on the players and a powerful awareness of The Third Entity™ – that morphic field that exists between players and that is more than the sum total of the players. Coaching from this perspective connects us with the power and potential inherent in the system as a living entity.

Napoleon Hill in *Think and Grow Rich* talks about “group think” and says: “No two minds ever come together without thereby creating a third, invisible intangible force, which may be likened to a third mind.” This is what we refer to as the “voice of the system” (VOS) or the Third Entity™. The International Society of Systems Sciences (ISSS) defines a system as “a family of meaningful relationships between the members acting as a whole.” To that we add that this “whole” or “third entity” is as much creating itself and the players within it as the players are creating it. In coaching or managing the system, it is the system itself that is the unit of focus, rather than the players and events alone. The Relationship Systems Coach/Leader focuses on what is happening between team members. S/he asks the question, “What’s trying to happen?” rather than, “Who is doing what to whom?” The fundamental concept is the connecting relationships between everybody and everything and the field or culture in which that exists. Holding this focus will bring into awareness the hidden forces and dynamics that are at work within the system or team. These subtle energetic forces are largely out of conscious awareness and yet they affect the team in dramatic ways. The cardinal task of the Relationship Systems Coach/Leader is to reveal the system to itself.

The Relationship System Coach/Manager believes that to the extent the system can be revealed to itself, it will become “response-able”, able to respond appropriately. Because of the self-regulating nature of open systems, it will find and create its own solutions. The system approach strives for wholeness and at all times notices the interdependence of parts and the relationship between players and between players and events.

Relationship Systems Coaching goes beyond Emotional Intelligence developed by Daniel Goleman (Emotional Intelligence, Bantam 1995). The first three of the five components of Emotional Intelligence point to the individual self. They are: self-awareness, self-management, and motivation. The final two components point to the need to have relationship skills: “the ability to relate (empathy)” and “social skill.” In a *Harvard Business Review* article on leadership (November-December 1998), Goleman says, “the very word empathy seems unbusinesslike, out of place amid the tough realities in the marketplace.” He then continues to outline why empathy is an important component of leadership, e.g. the increasing use of teams, globalization and the need to rely on virtual teams, and the capacity to retain talent. He defines the component of social skills as “friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire.”

The Relationship Systems model holds Emotional Intelligence as foundational. It then proposes moving beyond that to Relationship or System Intelligence. Rupert Sheldrake says that in all self-organized systems (individuals, teams, organization, and corporations), “there is a wholeness that depends on a characteristic organizing field of that system, its morphic field.” This is where a new awareness of systems is required of managers, coaches, and team members. This awareness demands the holistic perspective that in order to be in right relationship with self, others, and the larger world (or company), we must discover over and over again that “everything is in everything.” This approach supports discovering the wholeness that is available to the team. It holds the belief that “the part is place for the presencing of the whole” (physicist Henri Bartoft). Whatever shows up in one department contains the entire image of the whole company. Similarly, the company is part of a larger whole or a place for the “presencing” of the community at large. The ability to perceive and work with this system of interconnection is what Relationship Systems work is about.

In Relationship System Coaching, *the coach is holding the system to be the client rather than the individual team members*. Coaching Relationship Intelligence™ increases the system’s ability to adapt successfully, leveraging the dynamic interrelatedness of players and events. *A cardinal skill is “right relationship” as a competency of Relationship Intelligence. Right relationship is the ability to create and maintain conscious and intentional relationship as well as hold awareness of the interdependence of all parts. Conscious relationship allows us to be aware of what is happening in a given situation. Intentional relationship lets us be at choice on how to respond.*

In addition, Relationship Systems Coaching is “World Work.” As group and team members learn to navigate relationships at work, they are building the skills and muscles for successfully interacting on a global scale. The skills for creating conscious intentional relationship are the same whether you are on a team or in international relations. The Relationship System Coach/Manager makes a conscious and deliberate contribution to furthering relationship mastery on all levels.