



The Group Encounter Experience

As a participant in a group encounter weekend, I wanted to give each of us a better understanding of the purpose, the approach, and flow of our experience together.

Initially, I would like to discuss a source of man's needs as a means to give purpose to our encounter: Human needs are met through interactions with our environment – in large part through our actions with other people. The *way* we relate to others largely affects the quality of the fulfillment of our needs moment to moment, as we move through life. How we relate to *new* experience is driven by the nature of our past, and gives us a point of reference to our current condition. As an example, if we have been raised with full support, encouragement, and acceptance, we are more likely to be less afraid of trying a new business venture, or approaching a person of the opposite sex. We are less anxious, more authentic and relaxed. As an analogy, a plant grows to its fullest potential in fertile, and less barren soil.

For our purposes, the encounter group represents a microcosm of society. As with most relationships with others, some time is needed to “mill around”, and get a measure of emotional safety and trust. People need to feel that they can trust before they disclose and share. This process is iterative, and takes time. Although this “feeling out” is time consuming, and somewhat chaotic, the group behaves much like cells in an organism, guiding itself to self-support and health. As trust builds, it becomes a “fertile” social setting for experimenting with new, more satisfying ways of our being with other people.

In our society, time is a precious resource; interactions are organized with specific goals, schedules, and agenda. The school is a good example of this where facts, figures, and information is transferred as efficiently as possible. The development of trusting, real relationships exemplify a polarity of sorts with this: in this polarity, our group encounter is devoid of schedules and agenda. Expect our exchanges to be free-flow and experiential, as opposed to structured, cognitive, and intellectual. We will find effectiveness in this polarity, with mutual support of one another, to be time consuming. In the group, we can experience each other in the emotive, right half of our brain, where we rarely exist in our day-to-day lives.

Abraham Maslow, the famous psychologist, in his pyramid of human needs suggests that self-actualization, becoming fully what one intrinsically is, is not achievable without a foundation of belongingness and acceptance. The encounter group, in my experience, ultimately provides this as it grows and evolves. I look forward to our being together.