



Bringing Personhood to the Business Place

Forming and Maintaining Intelligent Business Relationships

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&

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Who We Are, and What We Do

Responsible Personal and Corporate Empowerment

- ✓ We believe in the inherent ability of people to create new, vital and excellent systems of thought and action.
 - ✓ **The Phoenix Centre** encourages growth in self-worth and self-responsibility
 - ✓ Lateral thinking is the Aikido of the mind.
 - ✓ The right approach flows from flexibility.
 - ✓ To thrive, we must *embrace* change as a friend.
 - ✓ We are open and accessible trainers. We present cutting edge ideas in clear, unambiguous language.
 - ✓ We train whole persons. We focus on the mind, the body, the emotions and the spirit. We recognize that balance is essential not only to productivity, but to happiness. We motivate by helping people to discover their own unique gifts and methods of operation.
 - ✓ It's the edge of the ski, not the steepness of the slope.
 - ✓ True productivity comes when people are empowered to live creative, meaningful lives.
 - ✓ Thriving companies "cross-pollinate." Ideas are everywhere.
 - ✓ Winning concepts are the result of the volume of ideas proposed and rejected.
 - ✓ Scenario design and implementation is successful in direct proportion to collaboration.
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Excellence in all areas of life comes from radical change both in our self-understandings and in our methods of dealing with issues we confront.

Creativity is a tool, but more importantly, a way of seeing. We live in a world of rapidly changing ideas, thought forms and understandings. Corporate structures are in a state of unprecedented flux. What has worked in the past may not work today, and will not work in the future.

People have the resources to find effective solutions while maintaining a balanced perspective in a changing world.

The Phoenix Centre for Creative Living was created by Wayne C. Allen in 1982 as a Counselling and Training Centre. Since 1990, the focus of **The Centre** has been two fold. First,

We are Agents of Change.

We train individuals and companies to find internal resources to deal with this most chaotic time. Second,

We bring a Holistic Framework to the workplace.

In tumultuous times, a psychotherapist's perspective is vital. Wayne Allen, in his private Counselling practice, has seen a dramatic increase in executives as clients. They seek the ways and means to return to productivity, to deal with burnout, to mend family relationships damaged by faulty work ethics.

We embrace the future. As such, we constantly seek relevant information. Our research includes hours per week "surfing the Web" for the concepts that are catching the attention of writers, futurists and planners. In this way, our clients are kept "on track" - in many cases months before new concepts are published. We need to know - and so do you!

Our goal at **The Phoenix Centre** is to create working relationships that are tailored, over many hours, to fit the people we are coaching. We do not have a "packaged plan" which we "drop" on unsuspecting companies.

We change world views. We create room for new thinking. We then focus these new ways of understanding on the issues unique to the business we are in relationship with.

We create long-term "mentorships" with the companies we serve. We work with you for the long haul—no instant fix or magic. Our results are deep and long lasting. They speak for themselves.

Our areas of expertise:

Effective, Focused Communication

We teach a hands-on approach to focused communication. We present working models using client data. Lateral thinking in a non-judgemental atmosphere develops ideas that are substantial and elegant. Critique is directed at ideas and issues, not at other team members.

Interdependence

Our goal is to stimulate the creation of teams that are interlinked -- whose members are invested in the lives and successes of the people around them. To that end, we teach how to intervene, to support and to motivate.

Independence

The Phoenix Centre teaches empowerment, not simply for use within the workplace, but in all areas of life. We see an essential unity of body, mind, emotions and spirit. We spend time helping each person we are involved with establish the ways and means of achieving wholeness.

A Self-Imposed Game Plan for Vocational Mastery - Wayne C. Allen

Achieving mastery of the contemplative, vocationally driven life is certainly an effortful process. Which is why, in past generations, those drawn to vocation entered religious orders, whether they be Zen, Buddhist, Sufi, Native, Christian or whatever. There, away from the "temptations" of "the world," the initiate could spend their time reflecting on the nature of humanity and "god," variously construed.

Such a "withdrawal from the world" is still an option today, either as a vocation or in terms of retreats. Indeed, **a Google search** on "vocational retreats" turns up sixty-nine thousand options. Add in "Zen" or "Christian" or whatever "flavour you favour," and the list will shrink to a couple of thousand, more than enough options for those who wish to focus in deeply, intimately and thoroughly. A week or a weekend away, devoted to depth, Bodywork and dialogue can work wonders.

But most of us can only manage such "retreats" occasionally, and others are downright scared or turned off by the very idea. What to do, what to do?

I suggest what I call the "self-imposed game plan."

What I mean is this: the organization you work for has as its goal **making money**. Pure and simple. Even social service agencies are, at some level, "bottom line" driven. Some of you lucky folk may work for a "Fast Company" that understands the spiritual / personal development needs of its employees, but no organization has this as its principal focus. The principal focus of business, is, wait for it, **business**.

It is important to remember this, and to stop whining that your company isn't taking your vocational needs seriously. Of course they don't, and certainly not as much as you do. Your life is your life, after all. So, while you are required, as an aspect of employment, to ascribe to the goals of your company and to participate in their development of business, nothing prevents you from, *at the same time*, creating an environment supportive of personal and corporate vocational development.

The key to this is to **Plunge Ahead Slowly**. In other words, I want to ask myself, as I make decisions, participate in the corporate culture and engage in the working through of corporate issues, "How can I *depersonalize* this activity?" Does that sound like a paradox? Good. It is.

One of the keys to mastery is the Buddhist concept of non-attachment. (There's a whole section about this in my book *Living Life in Growing Orbits*¹) Non-attachment is the relentless application of the mantra, "It's not personal. It's not about me."

Sure, others want to make it about you. Through blame. Through "reviews." Through manipulation and finger-pointing. The key, however, is to remind yourself that this approach is only effective if you assume that blaming, finger pointing and manipulation are actually tools that have the power to compel behaviour.

In other words, my game plan is to seek depth in my understanding of the true nature of life. People whose main occupation is to blame, to intimidate, may surround me. What I do with the behaviours of those who surround me will be governed, if I choose, not by them, *but by me*.

My approach, even though others don't "get it," is to breathe, stay centred in myself, and to *remain curious*. I will dedicate myself to asking questions meant to move past the games into greater depth. I will refrain from being drawn into "proving myself right." Instead, I will offer others opportunities for dialogue and exploration of alternatives.

All of this is only possible through *discipline*. And the key discipline is to see, in simple terms, the wisdom of the idea, "And this too will pass."

¹ <http://www.phoenixcentre.com/sample/starthere.html>

Change in the Workplace - Wayne C. Allen

It's a curious phenomenon, the fear of change that many people have. I suspect it has something to do with wanting to be in control. We see what's going on around us, and we scare ourselves with the pace, with the intensity of change. If only things would simply stay the same!

Our friends Debashis (my co-author of this e-book) and Adrienne Dutta gave birth a few years ago to a beautiful girl, whose name is Anjali Maya Dutta. Neat, eh? And within the definitions of her given names is a clue for dealing with change.

Her middle name is Maya, which means, roughly, "illusion." In Buddhist thought there is the phrase, "All is maya." This means that we really don't *ever* penetrate to the core of what's happening. We see the surface, and we what we choose to see. This is a central theme of my newest book, **This Endless Moment**.²

Thinking change is "bad or difficult" is maya—one illusion you can choose—just not a very helpful one.

I found a helpful quote the other day:

**"I am in charge of my life while recognizing
I am not in control."**

We can neither **deny** nor **control** change. Projects change, managers and co-workers change, the economy changes. Minute by minute. Our maya, our illusion, is that, if only we were "better" things wouldn't "change" (read, *be so hard*.) The way past distress is the recognition of the **inevitability** of change, and the ability to be in charge of my **response** to change.

Anjali, her father told me, in Bengali and other Indian languages, means, roughly, "an offering or sacrifice given to the gods which is blessed and then returned for our enjoyment and prosperity."

In this name is the seed of contentment. What if I understand that my gift is my vocation and that the gift I give to "the gods" is my wholehearted participation in the tasks I am given? I can't and wouldn't want to control **outside** situations (I'm

² (<http://www.phoenixcentre.com/press>)

not God.) I can and do choose to respond out of my wish to achieve excellent results in my work, and thus “be a blessing.”

Far too often, work is seen as “drudgery to be gotten through” as opposed to an opportunity to serve. If I wish to live a fulfilled life, my task will be to swim gently in a sea of change, contributing what I see as my gifts, without attachment to the results. In other words, I do what I do out of anjuli, while never missing the maya.

Imagine being blessed with those names—acting out of a sense of blessing while noticing that all is illusion. Methinks Anjuli’s parents have given this child the keys to the universe.

Detached Action - Wayne C. Allen

From a business perspective, how does non-attachment play out? It would appear that there are two ways to live out your life. One is to do things for **rewards** or out of **fear of punishment**. The second approach is to act out of the **burning desire to live your vocation**.

Many people have been conditioned by their upbringing to seek praise and / or to fear retribution. This is sort of Parenting 101, if you think about it. We were all socialized in this way.

So, at work, if you are focused on pleasing your superiors and not rocking the boat, you are **attached** to receiving praise for a job well done. If, on the other hand, your style is to do your job out of fear of consequences, you are **attached** to not being punished.

You will begin to see that such an approach means you are choosing to determine your feelings and your self worth by the response of others. Now, the truth is, others are reacting to their *own* set of beliefs and understandings, and are playing out either praise or blame on the basis of **their** upbringing. If **both** of you are doing this at the same time, non-presence is the rule of the day. All there can ever be is attachment to blame and guilt, and rewards and punishments.

It is "easy" to step out of this loop. The way out is **non-attached presence**. Although an easy concept, it can be difficult to apply. Let's try it this way. Suppose I begin to think that my vocation is to produce excellent results, no matter what I am doing, because I am "acting for (or as) god." I therefore consider my actions to be "godly" - driven by a mindful desire to be of service.

Now, if this is my premise, I am simply concerned with doing the best that I can, compared with **myself**. I'm not trying to be better than others, nor am I choosing to live my life by comparison. I am focused on one thing - Nishkamakarma - "doing my duty (living my vocation) with faith in God, without attachment to the results of my action."

I am thus a vocationally driven *enactor*—living **in the moment**.

Why in the moment? Well, it is easy to get caught in the trap of thinking that, with enough planning we can control our lives, our fate, and the destiny and direction of our business. In actuality, nothing is further from the truth. The mark of excellence is the ability to deal effectively and elegantly with the unexpected. Or, another way of putting this is: "Any moron can excel when nothing is going wrong. The wise soul is able to excel when the ship seems to be sinking."

Simple presence allows us to notice what is **actually** happening, and to deal with the unexpected. As we begin to act, we need to be willing to let go of looking for whom to blame, to let go of any attachment to “guilting” ourselves. Because to go there—to **attach** to blame, is to stop dead in your tracks. Sure, we have to figure out what went wrong, sure, we have to choose another way and see what happens when we apply that “other way.” Praise and punishment simply get us nowhere.

If you are an employee and are being subjected to praise or blame, begin a month-long project. First, find a place to go have a breath. Second, remind yourself, “This *behaviour* is all about my boss and his or her need to be **in control**—to **pretend** to be in control. While my boss may be into blame, I know this is not about me, personally. I may have to find another strategy or walk another way, but this is about staying present and being true to my self in all of my actions. It is not about personalizing and it is not about hurting myself. I gain nothing by beating up on myself. I gain nothing by *attaching* myself to my boss’ views of me, so I’ll listen without judgement. I am vocationally driven, and will return to producing excellence. I am an adult, not a child.”

Easy? No. Essential? Yes. Make this shift, or decide, right now, to stay stuck in attachment, defining yourself as others see you. As always, your choice.

On Building Relationships - Wayne C. Allen

One of the issues we all confront is coming home from work and remembering not to take work pressures out on the rest of the family. That's not to say we can't *talk* through the dramas. That's to say that we might be best served not shredding our nearest and dearest because of work pressure.

Here's a letter I received, and my reply, discussing this issue:

Q: My girlfriend comes home from work everyday and complains about everything that has happened that day. She does this every day. We are both factory workers.

I like to come home after a days work and just relax. She comes home angry and stays that way. She is always ruining my good mood. I have discussed this with her. She seems to think that since we are in a relationship, that I am obligated to listen to her problems.

I am very tired of her complaining every single day. How can I get her to not bring her work problems home every day??????

Interesting question! You're beginning to understand the complexities of being in relationship. You and your partner are demonstrating two classic responses to "coming home for the evening,"—wanting to gripe vs. wanting peace and quiet.

We all experience some form of "work pressure"—from deep enjoyment to despair. While we could take some time looking at changing things at work, let's just stick to your question.

You want peace and quiet, she wants to talk, to vent. They seem mutually exclusive, if that's **all** we're looking at. But what about the "building a relationship" part? The question I would ask you is this: "Would you rather your partner 'behave herself' and do what you want her to do, or are you working on building an intimate relationship?"

The first lesson we have to understand is this: no one "does" anything to us. Your girlfriend complains, and **you choose** to upset yourself—in total honesty, **you** ruin your good mood, not her. Because most of us have grown up blaming others for our misery, your idea that *she's* ruining your mood is predictable. It's just not accurate.

True relationship is about dialogue that brings deeper connection. You and your partner would benefit from a discussion about getting both of your needs met. Not one **or** the other. **Both**.

One approach would be to agree between the two of you to set aside 30 minutes when you both arrive at home. For now, let her go first. Set a timer for 15 minutes, sit down and encourage her to complain, long and loudly, about work. Your task is to sit quietly and open-heartedly, not attempting to "fix" anything, not having the expectation that "she get over herself." Just listen and hold in your heart the thought that you love this woman, and she's hurting and wants to share that with you. If she cries, hand her a Kleenex and let her cry.

When the timer dings, it's your turn. Re-set the timer for 15 minutes. Ask for what you want. You may want to sit in silence for 15 minutes. You may want to hug or cuddle. Or to dance. Or to go for a walk. Your partner agrees (in advance, remember) to be quiet and simply do as you ask. When the timer dings, have a hug and thank each other for being there and for being loving. Do this each evening for one month, without comment, without fail.

Rumi, the mystic Sufi poet, said,

"Essence is emptiness, everything else accidental. Emptiness brings peace to loving. Everything else, disease. In this world of trickery, emptiness is what your soul wants."

Please note, the word "disease" has as its components, dis-ease - not being at ease.

At the end of the day, we are in relationship to know ourselves and to share our knowing, thus being known by another. In this process, we find **ourselves**. We all are looking for the opportunity and the security to be ourselves. It's not about "making" people behave. It's about being open to sharing **all** of what our partner brings. By being "empty" of the desire to change the other, by being "empty" of the need to have it all our own way, transformation takes place, and the soul sings.

Creativity and Freedom - Wayne C. Allen

One of the things I learned by working for others, is that I was always able to create freedom of action for myself, *once I learned the ropes*. My mind is such that I'm a pretty quick study. Give me a job, teach it to me, and I'll quickly come up with ways to do the job faster and better. I was fortunate, back in my days of being an employee, to have bosses who actually thought that better and faster was a good thing, and thus gave me the room I needed to experiment and create.

I'm not one for *endless* reading. Which is not to say I don't read. I probably get through 40 or 50 books a year, and as many audio books. I love listening to the words of others. Interestingly, what I have discovered is how clever all of us writers are at saying the same thing using different words.

My reading is for the pleasure of juggling ideas. My *life* is about *implementation*. Many people, for example, get curious about Bodywork. I got curious **and** got my hands on some volunteers, and over a year learned how to **actually do** Bodywork.

Back when I was in training to be a psychotherapist, the staff would present a theory. Virtually all the other "baby therapists" would write notes and read and think about what they were learning. I'd immediately **apply** what I was taught, and evaluate the approach against what I was already doing. My supervisors would laugh and say, "Oh. This semester Wayne's a Gestalt Therapist." And they'd be right.

If you are an employee, I would suggest that if you devise a more intelligent way to do something, that you figure out how to test your theory. As a "boss," do the same thing, and encourage your employees to take a few risks—to think, to read, to innovate. Everything that has ever been invented, every successful management theory, was once a new idea. Someone had to have the courage to try it out, the courage to risk falling flat, and the courage to see the thing through.

In the end, you can be safe and secure in the predictable known. You can go a step further and live in your head and have fantasies of "different." Or you can implement change in the world by actually changing something.

You choose.

You Are, and Aren't, Your Work - Wayne C. Allen

Let me put this concept another way: I **am**, and I **am not**, what I **do**.

I am what I do in this sense: I want the words and actions I perform to always reflect what I *value*. There is a prayer that goes: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God." All that I do should be totally reflective of my *calling*. Any incongruity for politics' sake will lead down a really slippery slope. Nor, on the same hand, would I work so hard as to hurt myself, as this would violate my being fully of service.

The paradox is that, this being said, I am **not** my work. As soon as I *identify* with my work, or with anything else external (my salary, my possessions, my relationships) I am no longer free. I, by attaching myself to my work, am saying that a judgement about my work is actually about **me** as a person. This is totally counter-productive. I **produce** work—I am **not** my work.

In the end, if I learn this lesson, I produce work out of my vocational self-understanding. The work I produce will be consistent with my deeply held understandings of the workings of the cosmos. As my work becomes "real," it will be judged. I need to be able to step back from the judgement, hear it, think about it, and in that may perhaps choose to do *my work* differently. I will not, however, identify **myself** with the work.

My choice is to watch the movement of the thoughts I think and to let each, in turn, go. I may choose to re-evaluate my direction. I will be clear that my vocational and enlightenment needs take precedence over all else.

Paying the Price of Freedom - Wayne C. Allen

I choose to be self-employed because I've never been good at following arbitrary rules. On the other hand, I work well as a consultant because I have good eyes for seeing through corporate boondoggles. The freedom I have to take clients, or not, to work hours I set, comes with the price of not getting paid when I don't work. I also don't get paid to go on holidays, or to take training. Every freedom comes with a price. I would be a fool to set my life up so I *hate* the price I'm paying. I am not a fool.

I do what I do, as I do, out of *choice*. Sometimes, the choice is interesting. I've never been one for mindless paperwork. I work for an Employee Assistance Plan, sort of. They send me clients. They expect me to submit reams of paperwork, I suppose to justify their existence to those hiring them. I do the paperwork, despite not liking paperwork. Why? Because after I send it in, they send me money!

Now, I could gripe about the paper work (or any task I don't like) and make myself miserable. Or, I could insist they change to make me happy. The former makes me crazy, the latter means they tell me to go away. Or, I could live by my principles, and quit. Then, I don't get paid. Now, that one is worth a look.

I need to question whether what I am being asked to do violates my principles. My main principle is to "do no harm," so I wouldn't for example, work for a tobacco company. But to look at my dislike for a particular *task*, and do a "principle check" is easy. I hate paperwork because I consider it silly. It's not an *ethical* concern. It's a practical concern. In this case, I need to get over myself.

One of the prices Dar pays for the "joy of teaching" is having to complete report cards. Most teachers in Ontario hate the computerized report cards they're forced to use. Yet, I would find it odd if someone quit over them. Every job, every vocation, has within it elements we'd rather skip. The main question, barring ethical principles, is "Am I willing to give up my income over this?" If the answer is no, it might be a good idea to stop griping and simply do the task.

The time I spend on EAP forms is nothing compared to the counselling opportunities I get and the people I meet. And they actually pay me for doing what I love. How silly would it be to get my shorts in a knot over any aspect of what I do. As long as at the end of the day I feel good about who I am and what I'm doing, whatever small price I pay is worth it.

Because in the end, everything has a price.

The Mindset of Satisfaction

- Wayne C. Allen

The mindset with which we approach our work determines our satisfaction, plain and simple. I can't tell you how many people I come across who are firmly convinced that their company doesn't know what it's doing, and that there should be a way to change things. They go on to complain, gripe, gather in little clots in the lunchroom, and plot ways to "make" the company change. Or, they threaten to quit. Or they actually quit.

And the company just keeps on keeping on.

It's like change in society. Nothing happens overnight, not even a revolution. Wars change things, but wars typically run for quite a while. Plagues change things, as does technology, but both take incubation and persistence of use. Remember, back in 1968, a computer the size of a room, reading punch cards, had a memory of well under one meg. I know. I programmed an IBM 1620. Boy, am I dating myself . . .

No, change within the workplace is an *inside* job. I've always operated under the premise that, if I do my job and make things run more efficiently, my work will get noticed and I'll get the ear of someone. My task is to create a work environment for myself that does two things.

- 1) It accomplishes *for the company* what I'm paid to do, and
- 2) I do it in such a way as to maximize *my enjoyment* of what I am doing.

Those two things are also in the right order.

When I consult with a company, I have to accomplish the goals we've contracted for. How I accomplish those goals is largely up to me. If my style doesn't fit, I can easily adjust my style. If, on the other hand, the company itself is a bad fit, i.e. their way of doing business violates my baseline ethics, I am out of there. I have the flexibility to modify my approach endlessly. I will not, however, sell my soul to the highest bidder.

A job is just that. You're there to do what the people paying you want you to do. Ultimately, if you don't like doing what others tell you to do (that would be me!) you can work for yourself, recognizing that you'll be giving up the perks, like paid vacations. I haven't had a paid vacation since 1996. No sob story, just reality.

Do your job. Do it well. Figure out a way to make what you do fun. If you can't, plan an exit strategy and pick somewhere else to work. And do it all without complaint. No one is listening, anyway.

The 500-fold Sword - Wayne C. Allen

I remember watching a scene in a Martial Arts movie (which one I can't remember.) The hero is a master of the katana, the Japanese sword. His girlfriend, while he is sleeping, pulls the sword out of its scabbard, and starts messing around with it. He wakes up because of the sound of the sword. She takes a couple of swings at him with it, like she's playing with a toy. He gets her to stop and to hold the sword still, sharpened edge up. He takes a conveniently located silk scarf and drops the scarf from a foot or so above the sword. The scarf lands on the blade, and is sliced neatly through. The point: this is one sharp sword. **It is not a toy.**

My point: that kind of sharpness takes a long time to create.

Believe it or not, I went to a Technical High School. Two reasons: they had the best College preparation curriculum in Buffalo, AND, in 1964, they had their own computer. Because it was a Tech School, I had to take one tech course per semester, and one was the heat treatment of metals.

I don't remember a lot of this stuff—it was almost 4+ decades ago—I do remember annealing furnaces, and annealing metal. This process involves heating the metal red hot, to burn off impurities, pounding the crap out of the metal, making it into a thin sheet, then folding the metal onto itself, and pounding it back into the shape you are looking for. Then, you plunge it into sand or water, to lock the molecules into their new place. You'd do this several times, and the layered steel became much stronger and more supple because of all the pounding and folding, heating and cooling. It was also the only way to get the metal to hold an edge.

So, what's all this have to do with business, with life and with katanas?

Here's how a katana is made: the sword maker, who has studied under another sword maker, takes a steel blank and heats it, pounds it out, folds it over, and pounds it some more. Then, it's plunged into sand or water. Done once or twice, and theoretically the sword is annealed, and capable of taking an edge. Now, here is the point: the master then heats, pounds, folds and pounds the sword a total of 500 or more times! And that's just for a standard sword. If the sword is meant for a master, a sensei, it might be "folded" twice that many times.

Needless to say, you don't buy a sword like that in a knife store. Instead, you re-mortgage your house.

The work we propose to each person who comes to us at **The Phoenix Centre** is like making a real katana. We suggest a process of fire and pounding and folding. 500 times.

Often, businesses expect *instantaneous* change. We also expect it in our personal lives. Witness the plethora of self-help books on the market. As opposed, say, to my book, *Living Life in Growing Orbits*³. My book requires the discipline of one year of daily exercises. Most people bail after a month or so. They bail because they haven't the focus to stay with something like re-focusing their lives—they want it *now*, not a year from now.

Most companies, most people, want to buy an ersatz katana at the chef's knife store. Their thinking? "Oh hell. It didn't cost that much. If it breaks, I'll just buy another."

The problem with this approach is that there is no investment in the process, no ownership, *no real cost*.

In Feudal Japan, a good sword might cost a samurai a year's wages, or more. The samurai judged this to be a good deal, as the mettle of his sword would determine whether he lived or died. Before it was ever used, that sword had occupied the sword maker for months, and had required a year's work from the samurai. An amazing commitment and investment, "paid" *before it was ever used*.

Are you willing to live by the culture of your employer? If not, are you willing to invest years of your life to 'anneal' your company—so that the product you produce is "a 500-fold sword?" If not, why are you there?

Or, if you have decided that your work is **not** your vocation—if you are there to earn money to **support** your vocation—what are you devoting your life to? What is your 500-fold sword?

And before you answer too quickly, who is your master? Who has taught you (who is still teaching you?) the skills of the sword? How long was your apprenticeship? How long have you cleaned the shop, done the grunt work, sat at the feet of the master sword maker?

Do you see yourself as a *student*, as a work in progress? Are you willing to work slowly to anneal the metal that is your work, your life? Or do you think that the hard work is not worth it? That, when the heat goes up and the sweat begins to pour, it must be time to leave?

Or, have you skipped the apprenticeship altogether? Do you think that if your dinner is ready in 5 minutes in the microwave, there ought to also be an instant 500-fold sword? (Just add water and stir!) No sense going to school, finding a master, studying and perfecting your craft, if you can pick up a copy of "How to be a Sword Maker in 5 Easy Steps" at the local bookstore, after all.

³ <http://www.phoenixcentre.com/sample/starthere.html>

Have you created many, many 500-fold swords, swords that have stood the test of time, so as to be able to demonstrate your skill?

Or do you flit from this to that, never landing, in the end being a master *of nothing*? Have other masters acknowledged your mastery, or are you simply a master in your own mind?

Have you paid the price? Will you willingly pay it, again and again, over years and years, in the service of your craft? Do you seek adulation, or mastery?

Hard questions. But the world is flooded with swords that break when stressed. The 500-fold sword sings, then slices through.

Your choice.

Truthfulness in Business - Wayne C. Allen

Work is a **political** process. Businesses are in the business of their business. In the end, each business expects of its employees honesty, integrity and a positive contribution to the bottom line. Perhaps one could argue that the latter is the most important, as the bottom line funds **everything** the business does.

Businesses rightfully teach good communication skills, fairness, and how to resolve conflicts. Each of these areas, again, contributes to efficient operation, which leads to a stronger bottom line. It is in the best interest of each business to “create” people who know how to run a business. It is not the place of a business to oversee each person’s *personal* growth, unless what the person learns can aid the company in its primary mission, which is capturing more market share. Let’s not be children here—the point of capitalism is profit. If you don’t want to play in that arena, get out of the business. (Such “bottom line” decision-making even occurs in Social Work, (see Debashis’ articles, following) which, it would seem on the surface, is about personal development. It’s not. It’s about clearing cases and demonstrating to the government the need for more funding.)

Dar and I were talking about this the other day, as we discussed The Haven⁴. Dar’s off to do *Phase 1*⁵. As a teacher, there is no money for her *personal* development. If there was, Dar might be able to make a case for the benefits of Phase 1 on her communication and ability to relate, but it would be dicey. And honestly, Dar is not going with a primary focus on being a better **teacher**. She’s going to learn more about **herself**. This is a project in personal growth. Why, oh why, should her business be required to pay for that?

Second, integrity and honesty demand that, if our values don’t and won’t match that of our company, we need to move on to where they do match, or build a company of our own. This one comes up a lot at my Port Elgin office, where many of my clients are on stress leave from a nuclear power plant. They are pained by the company’s direction, and think the company should change to accommodate their discomfort. Then, as the plant doesn’t change, they make themselves sick. I figure they are within their rights to agitate for change through their unions, but if

⁴ <http://www.haven.ca>

“Through the activities of **The Haven Institute, Haven Foundation** embodies a philosophy dedicated to the enrichment and effectiveness of people’s lives. Our education programs and leadership offer people opportunities to gain new awareness, meaning and perspective in their lives. We believe human beings can best realize their full potential by embracing the principles of self-responsibility and wholesome relationship with others and the world around them. We promote a society where human beings are fully present and alive and we promote a world where all life is treated with open curiosity, a generous spirit, goodwill, compassion, dignity and respect.”

⁵ <http://haven.ca/db/a.courseDetail/id.9>

they are opposed on principle to the running of the plant, they should leave. To whine, make themselves sick, and **not** leave, is a sure recipe for disaster.

Truthfulness and honesty, first and foremost, begins with ourselves. We are called into a primary relationship with ourselves, and lack of personal integrity is responsible for pretty much all of the pain you feel. It is required that you spend your life finding yourself, and while you are thus engaged, that you walk your path of purpose by being of service to others. You speak your truth with honesty and integrity, and you encourage the same from others.

This is, simply, the only way to achieve peace.

HOW TO GET THE PERSONAL OUT OF THE POLITICAL IN THE WORKPLACE —Debashis Dutta

How do you handle the **“political”** in your work life while maintaining your integrity? It is not always easy to be **“personal”** with everyone because with differing agendas and different perspectives, a lot of conflict can arise. I like to think that we all have good intentions in what we do. I like to think that we are all open, honest and sincere. However, in situations, this intention of honesty, openness and sincerity, this “personal” part gets reinterpreted by others according their own agenda.

The politics of the workplace is a pot in which you can easily allow yourself to get stirred up. When we mix the political with the personal, here is what we typically do: badmouth, crazy-make, assume, justify our own anger and behaviour, make harsh judgments, isolate ourselves, create an “us” and “them” mentality, develop conspiracy theories, look for who’s not doing what, find the ways that we can’t do what we want to do and blame it on others, talk with others to get them to “buy in” to our perception of how things are, and on and on and on.

Sound familiar? This happens not only at work, but also in so many situations— in our family life, our personal relationships, and in our friendships. We expend an inordinate amount of energy, time and emotion in these things, and at the end of it all, nothing is based on reality. It’s only based on our perception and interpretation of events—our own spin on things. As a result, we are somewhat isolated, we have camps, we are suspicious, we lose overall focus, things don’t get done, and most of all, somewhere in there, we don’t feel good.

I can only speak from the perspective of working or volunteering in human services as a social worker. But as I talk with people from other professions, I recognize that politics happens everywhere. And I’ve learned about what gets in the way of getting the job done.

To me, it’s not the politics that is troublesome—it is the personal spin we add to the politics that really messes everything up—causing some intriguing chaos. And from time to time, I have also been a real perpetrator and participant in some political/personal chaos, which creates disharmony in at least some of my work.

My suggestion is to *keep the political and the personal separate* at work. This is tough because of the constant overlap between the two. But I think that with the following guidelines, it may be possible to do a good job, keep your personal and professional integrity, and maintain healthy working relationships with others.

1. First, and foremost, **AVOID NASTY SITUATIONS** to the best of your ability. Politics is messy. If everyone's energy is directed at maintaining the politics, then they are probably not doing what they are supposed be doing anyway. So, avoid it *by doing your job*. During one of my supervision sessions, I talked a lot about other people and how they were impacting the agency. His response was "do your job".

Me: I'm telling you – this agency sucks.

Him: Do your job.

Me: But there's so much happening out there that it's hard to concentrate.

Him: Do your job.

Me: Well, the other supervisor is saying weird things about me, and an intake worker really messed up on this one assessment and...

Him: Do your job.

On the one hand, I felt unsupported and judged that I wasn't heard by my very own supervisor—who's supposed to be there for me and my troubles (can you hear the violins squeaking out my sorrow?) On the other hand, (and many years later) I realize that he was trying to minimize my negative contribution as I tried to keep the politics alive. He just wanted me to do the work. And he wanted to avoid the nasty situations.

2. Next, **LISTEN WELL TO OTHERS**. Take in the information. Make an attempt to understand the information from the other person's point of view. Consider the source. Separate fact from fiction, fiction from politics, and politics from personal. Learn about what's being said. Look at how it impacts on your work. Try to keep the personal out of it. This is work. Remember that hearing someone and listening to them *in no way obligates you to agree with them or to take their side*. Again, focus on the task at hand.

I recall a situation where someone came to me from another team and began to let me in on all the badness and chaos that was happening on that team. I had previously no clue as to how bad it was. I knew of a few incidents that I wondered about, but didn't pay a whole lot of attention. So I heard this worker, took in the information. I kept telling myself there are several sides and perspectives to a story. But I did not deny, openly or in my mind, this worker's *perception* of what was happening. *I looked at how it impacted me*. And really it didn't. But gave me some information to keep in mind if I wanted to work on that team.

3. Be open and **HONEST ABOUT YOUR INTENTIONS**. If you're going to say or do something, know in your own mind what the reasons and rationale are for what you are about to do and say. Be clear and simple about this intention and also

be prepared to articulate it to others if needed. If you know exactly why you want to do something, then you can take responsibility for it and nothing else.

For me, this used to come up a lot. Often, when I do something without thinking about *why*, I am actually choosing *not* to be accountable for it. And then when I look at what my intention was, I lose some credibility because my intentions don't always match my behaviour or, my intentions may not have been clear from the start. So, now, in conversations with others and in doing things, I try to be really simple and clear about why it is I am doing what I am doing.

4. This one is tough. **DO NOT TALK NEGATIVELY** about anyone. In most social agencies, with the stresses of the work and with polarized teams, in order to deal with the frustrations, we talk negatively about one another. I am guilty of this. I get frustrated at the **situation** and take it out on the **person** by making a political situation into a personal one. Again, the effort needs to be directed at focusing on the *task*. This does **not** mean one needs to be friendly and close with everyone. But I do think that keeping situations light and generally amicable has some benefits.

I have a friend with whom I worked who can do this with great ease. This friend has been referred to as "Teflon" because nothing sticks to him. He is genuinely kind-hearted, and always has a smile, and is interested in everything you have to say. But, he also knows how to keep perspective and evaluate information so that he does not get "nailed" in the end. So, he never attacks a person, never says anything negative about someone, deals with issues at a political level and just does his work. I don't see this as manipulative or dishonest or artificial. I see him as caring for his fellow staff and genuinely warm. I also see him as having very clear boundaries for himself so that he does not get immersed into chaotic politics. And this man is loved by everyone, despite his not taking sides.

5. Always, always, **ALWAYS RESPECT THE DIGNITY AND HUMANITY** of the other person, especially in a political situation. Again, this does not mean you have to be friends with them. But being collegial and friendly is a strength. This is a challenge. We lose respect for someone and take away their dignity when we assign a contentious or political issue to them. Or when we attach labels. Or when we assume they **are** what they **speak**. Or when we believe that their behaviour is a true reflection of who they are.

In disagreements, we will quickly and almost instinctively form an impression of the other person with whom we have the disagreement. Most usually, this is a *negative* impression. And we judge them because their perception is different from ours. We take offence because they don't see it "our way." And somewhere along the way, we lose respect for them and take away their dignity. Rather, it is far more beneficial (and sane) to keep things at the level of a disagreement and allow for a disagreement to take place. Again, keeping your own intention very clear and making efforts to understand the intention of the other person is key in ensuring that nothing is given or taken in a personal way.

I recall a situation a few years ago when I met a new worker at my agency. Over time, I began to truly dislike her because she was on a different team from mine, she drove a car that worked, and she was overly enthusiastic and bubbling with ideas. She was nice to everyone and she just presented as very sheltered. I was polite to her, but avoided her, not really wanting to know her. And anyway, she was on a different team, which never did understand the work that my team did. So, I ignored her. But she made attempts to know me and eventually we talked more and I began to learn that she did not come from a sheltered set of circumstances, that her enthusiasm was reflective of her stage in her career and that I was like that too. Politically speaking, we still did not always see eye to eye at work and we differed in our approaches to working with people. But I grew to respect what she did at work because I focussed on my work as opposed to judging hers. On a personal level, I began to actually tolerate this woman.

I still don't agree completely with her working style and perspective and even her outlook. On the other hand, some time later we were married and have just had our first child.

Again, maintain dignity and respect for each person.

6. **DO NOT TAKE THINGS PERSONALLY.** You may feel nasty about the things that someone said or did. But they were probably not meant to be taken personally. Remember, *a system is always larger than you*. There are many, many different elements to how a thing works or even to how a conversation moves. When something causes some discomfort, try to understand the rationale or the intention behind what happened, and then move forward. Try to appreciate the differences that exist, because they reflect the true diversity and richness of the people around us. This is tough to do, but not impossible. Remember, a conflict or a disagreement is not a reflection of you personally, nor is it a reflection of the other person. A conflict just is. Don't get personal about it.

This one has been a tough one for me. I actually lose sleep over this kind of thing. I take a political situation and then take it personally. And it's because of my ego investment. I look at conflicts and problems and immerse my ego into things. In this way, I set myself up horribly. First, I take responsibility for things aren't even mine. And secondly, by virtue of taking responsibility, I give others the impression that I'll fix it. So, by investing my own ego into conflicts and problems, I become this self-appointed saviour who simply cannot save the entire conflict. So, if I take my self out of it, and focus on the problem and not take anything personally, I have more to offer the process and more sleep to gain.

7. **BE PASSIONATE.** All this political stuff I'm talking about can be interpreted as "saving your rear end." And I think there is some validity to learning about how to negotiate political situations. However, *try as hard as you can to not let the politics detract you from your passion and energy for what you do and who you are*. This requires a re-examination of why you got into your work in the first place, what kinds of hopes and dreams you had, what you promised yourself about your work. As well, this re-examination requires that you to think about what is getting

in the way of you being the best you can be, and how much of your passion has decreased because of you. If you're really, really, really responsible, you'll understand that YOU are responsible for your passion in your work AND your lack of passion, when that happens. Not others. Now, a system, a bureaucracy, other workers and various political agendas certainly can have an effect on your work. But it is really up to you to remain focussed on your work and remind yourself of your passion and your intentions for getting into this in the first place.

I've met countless social workers that are burned out, frustrated, resentful, angry, wistful, sad and just struggling to get by. They can be negative, critical and create havoc in the workplace. Heck, I've had elements of these things myself. Some of it is certainly influenced by the bureaucracy, funding problems, high levels of accountability, poor public perception, a resentment of government procedures, the pitiful pay and whatever else. But when I sit back and silence my negativity and think back to why I got into this in the first place, I refresh my attitude a bit and move forward. Don't lose your passion.

8. Recognize that **NO ONE IS OUT TO GET YOU**. Sometimes, it feels that way. Some days, nothing goes right, you're blasted for ten things and people look at you weird. And you wonder if someone has it out for you. Just do a little role reversal. You may dislike some folks, wherever you work. You may be worlds apart on various issues, perspectives, philosophies, methods of working, etc. But do you truly wish harm for that person? Probably not. Same thing applies to you. People generally don't want to harm you.

Recently, I heard through the grapevine that a piece of work I did was heavily criticized by someone else. I was not impressed about this, partly because of the criticism itself, but also because the other staff member had not talked with me. So, I steamed and struggled for about three weeks. And got more angry and anxious and stewed up some neat conspiracy theories (I do this quite well). And then, the other day, I put my ego in check and simply asked to speak to the worker—saying what I had heard, how I had interpreted it and then asked about the worker's intention. Needless to say, there was an element of criticism about my work, but there was nothing personal about it. Nor was there any intent to harm me. So, trust that no one wants to hurt you and then, if you're still putting yourself through some paranoia, gently, respectfully ask about it.

9. **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY** only for yourself. In another piece, I'll talk about the "spheres of control." But basically, you have only four things you are responsible for – YOUR feelings, YOUR thoughts, YOUR words, and YOUR behaviour. All of this blends into your intention. And that is what you are responsible for. So, own up only for your part—what you **did**, what you **said**, what you **thought** and what you **felt**. Do not take responsibility for an entire situation, its causes or its consequences. Just own your contributions and your perspectives.

10. Lastly, try to **KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE**. A more spiritual take on this is to remember that in your life, you are given only what you can handle. Work stress is what you make of it. You have total control over what you do with it, how

you mediate it, how much you invest into it and what you learn from it. You choose what you can handle and toss the rest away. There are other parts to your life and you may need to invest into these. I think the key word here is BALANCE.

SEPARATING THE POLITICAL VS. THE PERSONAL – HOW FAR IS TOO FAR? —Debashis Dutta

I wrote the piece about how to separate the political from the personal at work in order to cope with stuff that was happening at work. I liked what I wrote and it sure felt good to implement what I learned. And after some time, however, I got a little concerned about the article. I re-read it and thought, "How far can this go?" I mean, *Into the Centre*⁶ is all about enhancing the personal and creating intimacy. And here I go, sharing an idea that takes a marked departure from this line of thinking. In other words, I could be promoting a message of: "BE CAUTIOUS." This is not good.

"How far can this go?" indeed. Too far, at times. I recognize in myself many of the blocks and barriers I utilize to keep the political separate from the personal at work. As a result of "BEING CAUTIOUS," I become increasingly isolated from other workers, from my own work (and from my self). And these blocks and barriers help to raise *walls*. This too, is not good. So, do I forget about separating politics from personal?

No. I don't want to toss the whole idea because I think that the real value in this is primarily to **stay sane**. As well, separating the personal from the political helps to keep some order in my life. And, clinically speaking, keeping some distance between the personal and political helps to maintain healthy boundaries. Ah ha!!! And there's the difference—BOUNDARIES and WALLS. For folks who have been to Gabriola Island, B.C., to participate in Phase I at PD Seminars/Haven-by-the Sea⁷, a whole afternoon is spent on learning about the difference between these two. We'll talk about this another time.

When I think about the personal and the political, I find that the *personal* is all about what is *inside* different people. The *political* is all about what is *between* different people. Similarly, I find that *boundaries* are all about what is *inside* different people and *walls* are about what is *between* different people. And I also find that *closeness* arises out of *sharing* what is *inside* different people, while *distance* is created when different people talk about what is *between* them. *Understanding* is also about what is *inside* people whereas *interpretation* gets in the way of what is *between* people.

⁶ Our bi-weekly e-zine. <http://www.phoenixcentre.com/subscribelist.htm>

⁷ <http://www.haven.ca>

We can go on forever here and maybe one day we should. But for now, you get the idea...

Inside you and Me	Between you and Me
<i>Boundaries</i>	<i>Walls</i>
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Political</i>
<i>Closeness</i>	<i>Distance</i>
<i>Understanding</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>

How far is too far? Being too political does create distance, walls and leaves too much room for interpretation, or more accurately put – *mis*interpretation. My original intention in keeping things political is to maintain sanity and to focus on the task at hand. But I find that once I'm *into* being political, I generally have difficulty **stopping**. And my distance, walls, and interpretation spill out into other aspects of my life, namely my marriage, my family life, my friendships and my self.

Then come isolation, frustration, power and control struggles, arguments, misunderstandings, anger, frustration, silence, and a whole bunch of other nasty stuff. All because I want to "BE CAUTIOUS." Sound familiar? Tell me I'm not the only one here!!!

The free screensaver that Wayne offers as part of the HeartPoint/Phoenix Centre⁸ has one shot with some daisies and the caption, "Plunge ahead slowly." And I'm thinking that perhaps those three little words in this one simple line may provide a direction toward resolving part of this dilemma.

How does one do this? How do you *plunge ahead slowly*? I think of diving into a lake. It's easy to *plunge*. You just move, let go, let gravity take over and before you know it, you're *plunging*. The *ahead* part could be challenging. You do have to focus on moving forward instead of backward. To me, *ahead* means something new or working toward being on track. Hard, but quite do-able. And in diving, one does go ahead. And then *slowly*. *Plunge ahead SLOWLY???* I don't know about you, but when I picture myself diving, there is no slow diving. Gravity takes me down at the acceleration of 9.82 metres per second and there is no *slowly*. (This explains why I don't dive).

So how do we reconcile this oxymoron? I think the answer lies in really embracing the connection (the mediating factor) between the political and personal. And that is AWARENESS. Whew!!! I'm not undermining ***Into the Centre*** after all! In diving into a lake, then, you can't help but plunge ahead. But the slowly part is about

⁸ <http://www.phoenixcentre.com/screensaver/index.htm>

being AWARE of what's happening inside you and what's happening between you and your environment. The slowly part is about experiencing this awareness and living it and choosing what parts of the experience you wish to be more aware of.

At work, then, plunging ahead emphasizes for me, the importance of doing your work, doing it well and maintaining focus, while being respectful to others, honest about your intentions and being responsible. Doing all of this **slowly** means taking account of how what you do impacts others and how what others do impacts you. Simply being **aware** of your work is helpful.

So, instead of "BEING CAUTIOUS," it might be far more productive to "plunge ahead slowly." Instead of being too personal at work and instead of being too political at work, choosing to *plunge ahead slowly* might help keep the political separate from the personal, but not **too** separate.

THE PERSONAL IN THE POLITICAL

-Debashis Dutta

Preface

As I write letters to our four-month old daughter, I realize I want to give her a lot of tools and perspectives to go forth into what I sometimes believe to be a challenging world. It's fair to say that I want to "arm" her with as many resources as I can find so that she can use them to meander through her life. But I also realize that I'm arming *myself* and creating some neat perspectives for me as I meander through my own life.

The first article/letter I wrote to Anjali was about separating the political from the personal at work. I wrote that out of frustration and some "yucky" experiences at my own workplace. The ten little strategies to keep sanity and integrity were fun to implement. But then, I wondered about the impact of this on my "personhood". I discovered that as I focussed more on the "necessary" political distances, I became increasingly less personal in all areas of my life. Not good. And so, the next article/letter was born. It was about how to maintain the balance between separating the personal from the political and simply advised to become increasingly *aware* of situations and their impact.

The Personal is the Political

Through this personal-political dichotomy, the statement, "*the personal is the political*" has always been somewhere in the background. I've always wondered about how this statement fits with *Into the Centre*. "The personal is the political" comes from the feminist movement, which grew as a result of greater social consciousness in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The basic premise of "*the personal is the political*," from my understanding, goes kind of like this: If I'm experiencing some kind of personal feeling of oppression or dissatisfaction, and if you are experiencing something similarly personal and if we know others who have similar experiences, then these personal experiences are no longer personal. Rather, they are shared. And they may just be the result of greater societal forces impinging on our basic rights and freedoms. And arguing for these rights and freedoms involves a combined effort, aimed at the larger forces. Hence, the personal *becomes* the political.

Personal Issues in the Political World of Work

How does this relate to the workplace? Well, in one word that could find some of us uncomfortable – unions. Now before I go on, I want to give credit to the feminist movement for the statement, "the personal is the political." Any form of organized movement takes its mindset, philosophy, activities and actions from this one

statement. We all know of all sorts of protest movements throughout history and throughout the world and this powerful statement is at the heart of it all.

I want to suggest that unions employ the same philosophy. A group of individuals who work in an organization under specific management principles sometimes feel some personal challenges – wage inequities, the need for more vacation time, a fairer workplace environment, the need to make sure that the management does not move the company to a place that does not take into account the best interest of the employees, etc. They look to how other organizations and companies run and perhaps want similar benefits. And all the company or organization wants to do is have a competitive edge in the market, and meet their mandates.

The union then, provides the vehicle through which these grievances are aired and settlements sought. Very clearly here, the personal becomes the political. But then the discomfort around union-management relations arises. All too often, we hear about labour unrest and worker-manger strife and grievances and conciliations and mediations and lockouts and strikes. Then both sides (management and union) appeal to the public for sympathy. And then the media gets involved and there is misinformation, smear campaigns, skewed facts, and sometimes, violence. What begins as a group of workers wanting something extra ends up into a massive political affair where both sides are engaged in an adversarial problem-solving process.

And there it is – the words “adversarial problem-solving.” An oxymoron. And then we mix the feminist adage with this and we come out with – “a personal problem-solving process within an adversarial political environment.” That just reads as so incredibly gross!! And yet, that is precisely what both unions and management do when they work out problems. They take personal issues, turn them into political barriers, and try to engage in a respectful problem-solving process, all in an adversarial environment and mind-set.

NOW WHAT????

So, how do we reconcile these three seemingly irreconcilable notions - “the personal is the political,” “adversarial problem-solving” and “management-union relations?” Is it even possible?

*Into the Centre and HeartPoint/Phoenix Centre, through Wayne, Darlene and the ever-growing community of like-minded souls, subscribe to an extremely critical value base: By expressing the personal - openly, honestly, curiously – greater intimacy is created and the political walls come crumbling down. A real closeness *between human beings* is developed and greater understanding between us contributes to a greater sense of humanity.*

So why does this model tend not to work in the workplace? Why do “the personal is the political,” “adversarial problem-solving” and “management-union relations” end up creating more problems than solutions in the workplace? My suggestion here is that unions and managers have one thing in common, but exceptionally different

perspectives on the one thing – POLITICAL **POWER**. I have heard management types express a lot of anger and frustration about how they believe the unions seem to overpower the managers. Funny thing is, the unions say that the managers railroad employee rights. So, both camps are mutually unsupportive. But it doesn't have to be this way, does it?

Personal Power/Political Power

The whole concept of power is an intriguing one. It sometimes appears that power in a union (political power) is overwhelming. Unions, when they strike, are alleged to harm people by cutting off services, blow a big hole in the economy and whatever other bad things unions are accused of. Similarly, management power (again, political power) is also overwhelming. Management people are despised when they make a trillion dollars more than the labourer, when they take lengthy and expensive vacations, abuse employee rights, and whatever other bad things executives are accused of.

Either way, it's political power. Either way, it's a collectiveness of sorts that adds to power. Management teams add to a collective. And, union members add to another collective. I do want to say that I think there are differences in the amount, level and impact of this kind of political power, but a discussion of that issue goes beyond the scope of this article.

What is more relevant here is noting that the *collective* activities of both unions AND managers contributes to a *cumulative* power which increases the *political agenda* and purpose of either camp. The adage, "strength in numbers" comes to mind.

Sometimes, I wonder if the increased emphasis on the political power building then, takes away from the personal power. AH HA!!! I knew that eventually I'd get to reconcile some of this. {*Congratulations to those of you (and many thanks) for hanging on with me here. And virtual gifts and prizes to all who actually understand what the heck it is I'm trying to say.*} Ok, so political power stems from a lack of personal power, then ends up encroaching further on personal power, making too many things political.

That's a valuable statement. Political power stems from a lack of personal power, then ends up encroaching further on personal power, making too many things political.

Note that I am not trying to minimize the importance of managers and what I think is a specialized responsibility, nor am I devaluing the importance and what I believe to be the necessity for unions. Rather, I am questioning the impact of the POWER of these two political camps on the persons they are intended to represent.

They say that "power corrupts." For the purposes of *Into the Centre / HeartPoint/Phoenix Centre*, I would venture to say that political power corrupts personal power. Political power (in the extremes) creates barriers, walls, power differ-

entials, control, inequalities, harm, misinterpretation, and a lack of human integrity. And when political power touches human integrity, the risk of corrupting one's personal power is high.

Unions and managers, for all their good intentions in keeping businesses alive, keeping workers working and maintaining rights have the potential to use their respective political power to really impose distance, adversity, tension, and poor human relations and a usurping of personal power.

Does this sound like a workplace in which you either work or one that you manage (in some way)? Can you see how the "political" of your workplace contributes to the taking away taking away from the "personal" of the managers and the employees? Can you see how the personal is the political, but the POLITICAL CAN NEVER BE THE PERSONAL because of POWER?

Can YOU, whether you are a manager, an executive, a finance officer, a director, a board member, an employee, a union leader, a supervisor, a lead hand, WHATEVER your place in your organization, contribute in some, very small, minute way to decreasing the "political," by being more **aware** of your "personal"?

THE POLITICAL AND THE PERSONAL AT WORK – THE MIDDLE “P” -Debashis Dutta

Review

This will be the fourth and final piece in the series “The Personal and the Political at Work.” Let’s review a little.

The first article focussed on keeping the political and the personal separate at work. Ten suggestions were offered as a vehicle to mediate this separateness:

Avoid nasty situations
Listen to others
Be honest about your intentions
Do not talk negatively of others
Respect the dignity and humanity of others
Do not take things personally
Be passionate
No one is out to get you
Take responsibility
Keep things in perspective

The second article was written out of a conundrum of sorts. I realized that in implementing the ten steps above, one could take them to extremes and become quite isolated from the self in the process of separating the personal and the political at work. So, to ensure that this doesn’t happen, we looked at one of Wayne’s screensavers – “Plunge ahead slowly.” In other words, be political but not too political by being very aware of how your work impacts you and how you impact your work.

Article number three looked at how the feminist adage “the personal **is** the political” could be applied at work. It found that the political was informed by the personal and through this, unions and management would engage in “a personal problem-solving process within an adversarial political environment.” We explored political power vs. personal power and found that collective activities in the workplace would increase the cumulative power of workers – which would, in turn, increase the political power of the union (to ensure that worker rights were maintained by management.) However, in all this, there was a risk of the loss of personal power. Although the political is critical in the workplace, a suggestion was made: decrease the political by being more aware of the personal.

Missing pieces

In all this political / personal separateness / but-not-too-separate at work, I feel like there is something missing. I spent a lot of time thinking and writing about being aware, being cautious, maintaining a balance between personal and political power. In all this, the two extremes continue to unfold.

On the one hand, the *person* gets lost in the political landscape of the workplace. When you're dealing with politics all the time, trying to make place for yourself at work, you try to not get involved in a lot of things, and yet, to remain political, you end up getting dragged into something. In all this meandering, the personal becomes lost.

On the other hand, the reverse applies: the political can get lost if we are too personal. Imagine, if everyone did "the personal" at work: well, actually, in utopia, that would be cool. There would be honesty, openness, intimacy, closeness, productiveness, etc. BUT LET'S GET REAL!!!! Most workplace environments do not work that way at all. In most workplaces, if we are too personal, the political is lost and little tangible work gets accomplished. Take, for instance, any conflict-of-interest situation or dual-relationship problem. These situations are identified when the personal gets in the way of the political. In other words, someone's own personal interest gets in the way of getting the work done.

So, where is the balance? Where is the balance between the political and the personal in the workplace? How do you ensure that you don't lose your personhood in your work? How do you ensure that your "personal" doesn't get in the way of getting the job done?

A possible balance

In keeping with the political, the personal, the powerful, I have another p-word that I forgot about until now – which may help to reconcile some of the personal-political stuff at work. PROFESSIONAL.

Sounds so new, yet it's not so new, is it? Here's what I'm thinking. There is a split between the personal and the political at work. It's like having to wear two different hats, two identities, two entirely different roles. Add to this the environmental structure and practices and protocols and culture of your workplace and the personal-political chasm becomes even more larger. So, there needs to be a mediating factor or a role that balances the personal and the political at work. To me, that's "the professional."

Now at first, the word "professional" elicits more of a political feel to it than a personal flavour. And I think that in much of the work world (at least in my profession of social work,) we use "professional" to be political. Do you find this a similar phenomenon in what you do?

My proposal is that the professional is **a part of you**, one that balances the personal parts of you and the political parts of you. It sits in middle. On one side, the "professional you" ensures that your personhood is always maintained in your work (which is why the heck you got into your job in the first place, I hope!!!!). And on the other side, the "professional you" ensures that you are aware of working around the political environment of work.

Specific to the political, the professional in you ensures that you do the work you need to keep a job, to earn a living, to get a good reference, to learn some skills, to make sure your superiors are pleased with you, to get a promotion or a raise, have a good reputation with your colleagues, etc. Specific to the personal, the professional in you ensures that there is a little part of you in everything you do, that you take parts of your work and become a stronger person, that you learn from your work and build character, that you take what you learn as a person and bring these lessons to other jobs or other areas in your life.

I want to suggest that the professional is something that is created over time, depending on the role, work environment and your personal interest in whatever work you do. The political aspect of your professionalism is imposed upon you from your work environment and its own idiosyncrasies. And the personal aspect of your professionalism arises out of who you are and your own idiosyncrasies. And you then create what you want to be as a professional.

I'll use me as an example. I'm only going to use strengths for now. BUT NOTE THERE IS SIGNIFICANT VALIDITY IN LOOKING AT LIABILITIES (WEAKNESSES) AS WELL!!!!!!!!!!

I am a professional social worker. Here's the politics of what I am. I belong to a professional regulatory body that makes sure I am competent in what I do. I have to take a certain number of training hours each year to ensure I can actually continue to use the title "social worker." I am an employee of a child welfare agency. As such, I am particularly involved in child abuse and neglect issues and the role of child welfare in my community and in society. Specifically, I work in recruiting, training and assessing foster families. So, I am trained in various assessment methods to properly assess foster parent(s), who are going to work with foster children and with professionals in the child welfare system. I also come from a family preservation background and have some specialties in group work. So, I am very much in tune with disadvantaged families and I make noise about oppressive government policies. I have worked in numerous organizations in a number of capacities and bring with me a great wealth of knowledge and experience in how to work in an agency.

I am a professional social worker. Here's the personal of what I am. I am genuinely interested in not only people's problems, but also the paths they take to resolve their issues. I am warm, caring, encouraging, gentle, and nurturing. Most people feel comfortable with me as a therapist, social worker, group worker, and colleague – whatever role I take at work. I find myself to be a generally approachable person and can make most people feel at some ease with me, so they let down their walls

and can share openly with me. I use my self in my work when I think it is helpful in the help-giving that I do. I very honestly appreciate and respect the struggles people endure and enjoy watching the growth that occurs as a result of their learning and making healthier choices. I have worked with literally hundreds of people and bring with me a great wealth of knowledge and experience in learning from their growth.

So, the professional part of me is really a combination of what my workplace wants me to be and who I am. I am the one, as a professional, who determines what parts of my person will interact with my political work and what parts of my political work will interact with my personhood. Sometimes, it is helpful and sometimes it is critical to seek supervision or some personal coaching through my wife, family and friends to make sure that the professional part of me is, indeed, balancing the political and personal parts of me.

So, what about you? Who and what are you as a professional? What experiences from your work have impacted you as a person? What parts of your personhood impact you as a professional? What are the goods and the not so goods about you (both politically and personally) that makes you the professional that you are? What do you want to do in order to become a better professional? Who can you talk with or get guidance from to help you to maintain balance?

We've spent four articles looking at the personal and the political at work – how to separate them, how to make sure **you're** not too separated, how to maintain personal power while still remaining political and taking more responsibility in being the professional – the real link between the personal and the political. My wish for folks who have meandered through this journey with me is for you to have a *more aware, balanced and empowered* perspective at work....