

Operating Principles

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“I” POSITIONS represent the total statement of the self —what I believe in; what I think and feel; what I stand for. Of necessity, any such statement is incomplete, and the following are examples of what an "I" is about. Every person should know where he stands in the black, white and gray areas of life. Defining what one believes in is a full-time job and living up to that definition would require many lifetimes of work. This becomes apparent when one stops being responsible for others and puts the focus on self.

There are many ways to avoid "I positions," including the use of the unconscious as a sort of garbage bag — "I didn't mean to hurt you, I must have done it unconsciously." As if my unconscious belonged to me, but really lived in another body. The idea of "me and my hostility, me and my problem" place these things outside of self and are no substitute for taking a position. We all create our fantasies for our own purposes. They don't simply happen. When there is a gap between what one says and what one does, the empty space may be due to that which is out of our awareness, deception or falsehood. In any event, the result is the same.

"I positions" include the moves we make toward people or objects. They place us in systems with others. These positions offer each of us a challenge, and make life hum. One can do *some-*

thing about *everything* even though life is full of helplessness. The challenge is there and a genuine belief leads to movement. When there is a gap between what one hears and what one sees; when there is a gap between what one says and what one does, follow the movement and forget the words. I did it and no one did it for me — is the definition of self respect. The biggest failure is to avoid trying; nothing ventured, nothing gained. To try, to expose oneself, to be willing to fail, all of this is to succeed. Of course, it all depends on what one tries. To assert self is a valid position whether others agree with it or not. That is different than trying to be Number One. Ambition should never be confused with taking a position. The price for such ambition is too high, since antagonism and the helplessness of "I can't" is too high. Such approaches tend to become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

A genuine position avoids trying to prove anything. There is a confidence that "a good product will sell." Tell people what you know, and learn from them — always learn. If one were to stop learning, he would know everything and the system would be closed, the mind would be dead, there would be nothing unknowable or unknown.

No product is ever perfect, but do you buy the package? So many families spend their time fighting over issues that mean little in the passage of time — a clean or dirty floor, the mark in math, the tone of voice. The real issue is, "Do you buy the package? Granted, the other person is imperfect, but so what?" There is a lesson in humility here in the sense that one must become

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or remain teachable, able to learn from others. A fearful person may wear the disguise of humility and not be humble. He can anticipate the worst which goes beyond the reality of the event. He is so important, how can he ever lend importance to the other, what does it mean to be a wife, husband, a lover, a parent, a child?

The commitment is not to the preservation of any relationship or to having the "right" kind of child or to the extension of oneself. The commitment is to the preservation of connectedness and learning how to do that. Often people, and even therapists, avoid the problem by talking about others, and how to get others to do such and such. They are the problem. The problem is more often the lack of connectedness, the lack of a relationship. A relationship can begin only when two people accept the fact that they deserve each other emotionally, that they are two peas in a pod. Individual statements about "my being a special pea" are destructive. We all see each other from a different perspective — and that is what we most often deal with — perspective, a set of glasses, not truth. Children see parents from the viewpoint of a child. It is one thing to be the daughter of a passive father, and another to be the wife of a passive husband. But people tend to take things personally, lacking a sense of history, of extended family, of being one shadow in the passage of time.

One must deal with individual statements about himself in terms of the small print of his own insignificance both from himself and from what is left unsaid from others. He has to be able to laugh at himself in the face of criticism and/or praise from others, and convert such comments into the history he shares with that person. He must rise above it all. When talking to someone whom you care about, always imagine another person perched on his shoulder. (Perhaps on your own shoulder too.) When the conversation seems to be "irrational and beyond understanding," there are always more than two people involved. This helps decrease the intense feeling of "taking it personally" and "you really meant to get at me."

There is the pervasive feeling that one cannot get into a system until "I am a person and have found myself." While there is some truth in that feeling, most of us do it simultaneously, part self and system, and not in sequence. To do one at the expense of the other is to get nowhere. While one waits to become a person, the system dissolves. While one focuses on the system, self dissolves. And there are children. One must look to the future and not to the "happiness of self in the

present." Maintaining self and an ongoing system is truly difficult and the "I position" of each self is important in this process. Nobody needs to like me, but everybody should study me and even some should learn from me. On the other hand, life goes on beyond our death, into the future, into our children. (I never could understand people who could not take their children into consideration when thinking about divorce.) Yet, I must be something even if I am not much. One never sets out to hurt the other, but hurt and closeness are handmaidens.

One alternative is peace at any price, setting out to please the other, but this leads only to war, turmoil, and inner burning. One must do his part regardless of what the other person does. Perhaps this will influence the other but it may not. Life is not a popularity contest and one must learn to survive the feeling of being unloved. Conditional change — "I will change if you do" is no change at all. Any "I" position worth anything will receive positive, negative and neutral reaction. If the reaction is all positive, then the "I" position is either minor or a con job. Most people are too busy with their own lives to care what one person stands for. Much of what anyone of us stands for in the long run is a matter of taste and form, not of substance. The important point is to define one's own position and respect the taste and position of others.

Connectedness

Connectedness implies the ability to link up with important others in an association that is not fastened together. It implies the ability to meet, to communicate, to be able to transfer from one relationship to another. There is an emotional bond but not a unity. This ability to be close to others is the only need in life and it goes beyond survival. Connectedness is the one exception to the rule that states, "Anything one puts into the category of a need is destructive, a hook into something." The hook can be a particular person or an object, such as drugs. The very need kills off the relationship much like when one over-waters a plant that he loves too much. One needs people, but not one particular person. A good relationship in the family, or outside for that matter, is defined by the following: You are one of the most important people in the world to me, but never forget, given sufficient reason, I could throw you back into the pond tomorrow.

In any relationship, need should be replaced by want. This removes from the relationship the avoidance, demand, and push, and substitutes giving *to* the other without expectation *from* the other. One can begin to give to others what they want, and not what one would like them to have, or to be. If one gets hooked into a particular relationship, he tries too hard to make it go. This can only be accomplished at the expense of spontaneity and free flow of movement. It takes two to tango, and two to have a personal relationship. One can only do his own part and be content with that. The very effort to struggle to do one's own part, with the possibility that he might be left naked and alone, is the definition of success.

To be connected, one must be able to initiate activity, enthusiasm and movement. If you stand still while everybody else is moving, you will be left behind. The world is too busy to pay attention to the self-centeredness of any one individual. Connectedness is an active process, give and take. To sit still is to die inside while waiting — to have never tried and to live with regret. Life then becomes a living hell, a living death, a half-dead life. So many people go through life like that and never even know it. Single parents are a good example of people who find it hard to give up hope outside themselves. First they get rid of their problem by a divorce, then they get rid of other problems by therapy, then they face the implications on their children and have to confront guilt, reparation and bitterness. Not too many make it.

Being connected is intricate, and involves the flow of movement through a process, over time, without getting too involved in any one episode. For example, adult company and child company are different. A mother will spend time with her children and love them deeply. At the end of the day she looks forward to seeing her husband and talking with him. She expects his company to be different, that he will listen and give to her. He has been with adults all day and wants peace and quiet. His re-entry and her pursuit meet and conflict. The gap often becomes unbridgeable. So talking becomes more important in this society than listening. But is it more important? It has been said that some people have speech defects — they can't listen. It has been said that God gave us two ears and one mouth and that makes listening twice as important as talking.

If one finds a friend who can listen, then he has the beginning of a personal relationship. When one listens, he does not advise unless specifically asked and he does not apply an emotional Bandaid to make the other feel better. Then he

can be trusted and believed over time. The person who listens can think and preserve his options to pull back from one episode and move in on the other. He becomes wise in a political, systematic way. He begins to realize that parents are people and should be treated accordingly. Parents, after all were not born at the age of 35. There is, in the long run, no difference between parents, husbands and wives, adults and children, men and women. These are people and there is a potential, a hope, a daydream within them. Episodes would fade into insignificance. Power would be seen as a sometimes thing that we all exercise when given the opportunity but it is rarely if ever equally distributed. Life is unfair, but who said it should be or could be otherwise? Given these circumstances, one must talk about what is, not what I should or could have been. I do, think, and feel. I have to stay connected, if possible, through marriage and blood. If I have an uncle, cousin or others, it is my job to contact them, to stay in touch with them. I cannot write it off as the job of my spouse. Each one must take care of his own extended family, issuing the invitations and the communications. One does it as part of a belief system irrespective of the joy or pain in the connection. Just as all touch is not sexual, all connectedness is not enjoyable. The connection precedes the orgasm and sometimes the orgasm is not there.

Dysfunction

When dealing with an emotional or feeling climate, the most important idea to keep in mind is function. Does it work or doesn't it? The stuff that people in the family throw at each other and around the room in therapy ordinarily is not the real problem. It is human nature to concretize the unknown, to make the unsure sure, and that is what we often hear from patients and return to them in kind. So the therapist listens and hears dysfunctional principles, some of these from his own self, some from the patient and others from the generations. The patient looks back at his family and wants to be the same, or different. The therapist looks at his practice and reputation and wants to be more, or less. Both look inside themselves and the honest therapist will talk about his insides. The therapist cannot evaluate and weigh every episode, every situation, every principle or he will end up in the same confused position as the family Ruled by emotionality, he will tend to reduplicate the problem that the family brought

to him, his bias will intrude. He will answer questions to avoid being rude, and after all he does owe the other a viewpoint. If he has no viewpoint, then what value is there in being a therapist? He will avoid answering because he does not want to intrude his own bias on another's life. In many areas, he has only a viewpoint and not the truth. This leads to paralysis, compromise and the avoidance of any position. He cannot respect his own position any more than he can lend respect to the position of others.

In therapy, the therapist puts his own operating principles on the line as much as he demands that the members of the family do the same. As the members of the family emerge and begin to take real positions, so too must he. A family or a particular person may project a particular picture of the therapist and, unless you have some firm, predetermined picture of what you believe in, you will have a part of, and encourage what they believe in and project on to you. What do you believe in? The day when a therapist can say, "Well, what do you think about that?" is long gone. Now the therapist has to be some kind of an expert. Just as it is in the family, the therapist always plays a part in what people do to him. Like members of the family, he is an active or passive participant. Function is strongly influenced by the feelings inside the therapist, the person and the family, and especially by those whom each one of us cares about. Since we care about this person in this way, and that person in that way, the solution is almost never an either-or situation. Fault lies both in the person and in the system. Which is more important? To feel better or to break off a system and feel lonely? To do what is best for me and let my children go down the same hole? Much of the divorce movement today is centered around what is best for me without thought about what is best for the children who follow me and who are my children. Happiness and function not only go back into the past generation, but forward into the children whom we all love so much, into the future. In that process some of us get the dirty end of the stick and ask "Why?" Process or self? If one is an historian he will take the position of process. If one is an individualist, he will think of his own self. Both are reasonable, both are important, and each of us must make that choice.

If there is any basic dysfunction built into the system, into the family, then nothing will work. If people simply do not care about each other, then the system is dead. If one places his love for his child above his love for his wife/husband, then

all is dead. The family is a funny kind of business. Either it works completely or nothing works. It is like nerve tissue, all or nothing at all. You can have a business where one part is losing money but the other part is so strong it can carry the weak part. But that is not true in the family. In the family, all must work or nothing works — not at any given time, but over time. One may feel better in the face of dysfunction in the other person so we all have to face the question: Function, or Feeling Better? If we seek function, then goals must be long range. One must exist for others beyond self — for children, time and people unborn.

The "why" of motivation becomes less important than the ability to see others take off and move in a direction that is better for them. It is better for them even though it is different from my direction. Inside oneself, as a therapist or a member of the family, one dies. One may disguise continual dysfunction under the cover of fault and blame, trying to be without fault or always taking the blame. The result is the same — ineffectiveness. One must begin to believe in the family, or something else. Can something be truly ineffective if it leads to connectedness in the family over time? Or is winning and losing, right and wrong more important?

Examples of functional principles include the following:

People should learn to think out loud, to paint a picture that goes beyond simply giving conclusions. The last chapter of a book gives the conclusions but does not give us any idea of what is going on in that person's head. Thinking out loud opens the mind up to progressive feedback as the process unfolds and clarifies patterns of function or dysfunction which might not be so apparent if viewed as episodes or figured out within one's head. It uses a macroscope before a microscope.

Don't meet demands from anyone if they are dysfunctional. You can't change others but you can refuse to participate in that which is irresponsible. As a therapist, be a worker and take charge of the family, or therapy will simply reduplicate dysfunctional patterns in the family. Listening is at least equally important as talking.

Expect others to take a reasonable chance and trust you since there is no alternative except a different therapist, spouse, etc.

Don't try to earn trust but listen and allow people to amplify their viewpoints before moving

in to make a point. A clever point which is not heard is a worthless point. Feelings that come out in ventilation are not rational or irrational. They are *feelings*, the soul of connectedness. To compare them by the standard of rationality is to compare apples with oranges. Feelings connect but do not solve problems. Thinking is necessary to provide the organization and structure required for problem-solving. And thinking requires time and patience.

In any story, important pieces of information are left out, possibly including the death of an important family member, the move to a new locality, the growing up and leaving of children. Start with an overview of the genogram.

Control is important for functioning since functioning is not a natural evolution any more than closeness is attained without work and hurt. One must have an overview which goes beyond episodes and "feeling better" into what is best for the family and the generations to come, not simply what is best for me. From the overview of the genogram comes a perspective, a set of glasses that puts my self into a much larger system and gives me a different kind of understanding. It teaches compassion for the tiredness of the over-responsible person and yet looks to that same person to be the primary agent for change in the family.

As one moves through the family, symptoms and problems must be humanized. Make them less toxic by interpreting them in a positive light. Bend the truth in each one's favor since most truth remains unknown and unknowable. "Your father is angry with you because he loves you."

Be supportive of change and have an infinite curiosity for that which works in the family. Time spent defining that which works is more valuable than the endless analysis of dysfunction.

Function demands a search for a problem-solving framework, so don't become obsessed with symptoms.

Avoid fault and blame and present responsibility as a joy, not a duty or a task.

Look into the family for that which has worked. Do not become bogged down in pathology but follow the flow of movement over the generations, the family themes, what is and has happened. Don't fight that flow or shift it too rapidly. Get one change at a time, even if small. Problems are made up of millions of small parts and not one major event. The solution lies in tackling these one by one in some kind of infinite process.

Do not be discouraged. Every time one problem is solved and two people move closer to each other, there will be a setback. You attack Problem A, solve it and move closer together, and — Problem A reoccurs. That is par for the course since the closer two people get, the greater is the urge for fusion and emotional upset. Much as been learned, and closeness is more present. One must return to the forge, a never-ending process.

Many will give advice about anything and there is little worse than unsolicited advice. At best most people will advise from their limited background and tell you what they would do if they were in your position. They will mind-read, relate to motivation and help you to avoid change, or advocate drastic change. The effort to change is discouraging and one can probably go only so far in one generation — in one lifetime.

One can rate his life by the amount of distance he traveled, not by where he ended up. One must understand himself in the context of the family he came from and the same applies to his spouse and children. It is a long trip for everybody. Individuals and life systems are so complex that one must over-simplify to get any understanding.

As soon as possible get rid of the intrusive aspects of the network that surrounds a family. Get them out of the picture. Get rid of courts, welfare, police and probation departments. Then the family and the individual can begin to handle the emotional problems.

Principles for Therapy

All the principles that apply to members of a family apply relatively to therapists and therapy. The therapist has little time with the family and must use it to the fullest. He will often have to interrupt and control the flow of conversation even as he is directing the family to do the opposite with each other. These are realistic limitations of therapy and reinforce how important it is to teach that change occurs at home and not in the office. The office is but a small slice of time wherein people get ideas, direction, but not change. Many people get along with their therapist but have disastrous relationships with their spouse, parent or child.

The first principle of any emotional therapy; is to rule out physical problems since the diagnosis of emotional problems remains one of exclusion. When the person has a clean bill of health, we assume the remainder is emotional. Every individual must be placed into the widest perspective

and seen as a spiritual, intellectual, feeling, emotional, physical, imaginative, and crazy person. Principles will apply to all of these perspectives and one set of glasses does not exclude the other but interplays with and complicates the other. A narrow therapist will foster a narrow patient. For example, emotional problems often disguise themselves in physical symptoms such as ulcerative colitis, hypertension, ulcers, etc. If one is a physical therapist, he may prescribe medication. If one is an emotional therapist, he may talk to the person even when he needs a blood transfusion. The total therapist will take all of these aspects into consideration, realizing that it is difficult to talk to someone who resides in the cemetery. Symptoms are then translated into the family system so that they take on both an individual meaning to the person and a systematic meaning within the large picture of the family. What is the purpose of this symptom, what would the family be like without it, when did it start, and what was going on at that time, what is the evolutionary background of the symptom, why this symptom and not another? If a person complains about an inner confusion, what does it mean? What is the confusion in the family? Symptoms reflect the family, and the family reflects the symptoms.

Useful therapy is a hurtful process with much sorrow. If things are done easily and everybody is happy, you can be sure that not much of anything has happened. When people avoid something, or put it off till last, then you know that there is emotional gold lying in that issue, since we do the most difficult and most profitable problem-solving last. Stick with major themes and don't spread the context all over the place. Pick one or two themes and follow them. This is the value of theory. Theory says that too wide a theory and too many episodes lead to information overload and confusion. If the therapist does not stay focused, he will become lost and add to the confusion resident in the family.

He must remember that no change can occur in the presence of triangles so de-triangling becomes one of his major initial tasks.

He must keep his own level of anxiety down so that, faced with a suicide, he does not panic and add to the upset in the family. He must realize that he can do nothing for someone who cannot or will not make a commitment to life. Lack of commitment closes the back door on life and therapy. At that moment, the wise therapist will think of hospitalization, not as a cure but as a control — a method of buying time. Life is a balance with death and we are all free to take "I"

positions, and should. But there are consequences which must be paid for any position. One may have a viewpoint on suicide as anger turned inside or outside, but never forget — anger on the part of the therapist or anyone else is always useless and most often destructive. Sometimes we get away with it.

When talking to people, take the topic or issue as far as you can productively go with it. Don't move to the next point until you have exhausted the issue that you are on. Too much of scattered conversation or exchange of viewpoints will diffuse all issues, prevent learning and ultimately lead to win-lose, up-down, point-counterpoint, if this principle is not followed.

Stay where you are until there are no more fish to be caught. New therapists especially, tend to try to impress everybody by listening to everyone, trying to get all members of the family talking, and wanting everyone's viewpoint. But families very often do that at home — multiple viewpoints and few conclusions. One does not make a system work by listening to everybody. One does not get peace by inaction. Peacefulness is a very active and sometimes controversial process. Listening and swallowing one's viewpoint is a part of that process. Inner peace means that both you and I must feel badly at times. If one can get beyond the "feeling bad" — beyond the episode, he can begin to laugh at things and mostly at himself. And what a relief that is! So we laugh and then we cry and then we take on the real difficulties, the embarrassments, the things that make us feel foolish and awkward. We learn as therapists what it is to think. To think is to picture in the mind, the factual flow of events and the people. The picture has a flow like a movie and is a discipline of fact woven into structure. The color is the emotionality which must blend in with thought. A picture truly is worth many thousands of words.

Communication remains one of the primary tools of the therapist and he must do it in his own way. He can learn from others but it must come from his own self in some believable, charismatic fashion. Charisma is not the same as quackery. Remember that after the "But, Yet, However," comes the real statement. "I like you but .. ." Become aware of the tone of voice, the pitch, the clip and the speed. That is a clue to anxiety. More people like to talk than to listen but one is as important as the other. Each demands patience.

See dreams as non-verbal, non-specific communications between a person and his own self.

People often have the strange notion that a dream is a message from afar, from outside self. A dream is really a creation of one's own head; it comes from and is created by self. A dream is like a garage attic where unused stuff is stored. Different people store different goods and use them differently. There are no universal symbols. What is important is the emotional content. Was it fear, elation, or sadness? I use dreams to document what I already know about the person. Listen to dreams, but don't tell people that they have to have them, or report on them.

In listening to people, never give advice that is unsolicited. Most people know what they have to do. A child who says, "I am lonely" knows there are other children to play with. If advised of other children, he will complain that no one ever listens to him. The advice will be heard as a turn-off.

Restrain the urge to be sharp, quick and impressive. Get in tune with the rhythm of the person you are speaking to. Get to the point where you can repeat back to him what he said so that he will say, "Hey, that's what I mean." Then you are in tune. Teach members of the family to do that with each other.

As an expert, the therapist must have a body of knowledge. He cannot wait for it to come from the family. For example, he must know a great deal about what a functional structure in a family is, but that structure only goes so far. Structure carried to the extreme, without paying due attention to the uniqueness of each individual, can be stifling.

Areas of parental authority can be defined but it is foolhardy to try to define all areas. When the area of children is undefined and does not belong to either parent, then the first parent involved takes over and the other parent stays out of the issue.

The therapist must know and believe that the person who hates, or tries to get back at others, only ends up destroying himself and the function in the family. Mostly, the therapist must know himself. He must develop a careful way of telling people about himself and his wife, so that he is not giving a continual success story, a put-down of others in his family, or monopolizing the con-

versation. There is a way of telling others about my problems that lets them know where I am at, that lets them know what I think and believe, that puts no burden on them to help me or to defend themselves. This allows them to hear me and realize that I am trying to get my own life in shape.

Desiderata

The following advice was found in old Saint Paul's Church in Baltimore, dated 1692:

"Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible without surrender be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons, they are vexations to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time. Exercise caution in your business affairs; for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals; and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment it is perennial as the grass. Take kindly the counsel of years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness. Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore, be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy."

