

INTEGRATIVE LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONAL

“Helping individuals and organizations become integrated.”

Lessons on the Path:

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“Being in Flow”

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OBSERVATION:

Last week, Lillas met with the Program Manager of one of ILI’s Clients on a Monday afternoon and was asked to update/redesign their entire Leadership Development Program (LDP) in the next four days. This included redesign of the five core courses and creating three new ‘optional’ courses for participants to add to the existing ‘optional’ courses they already offered through their LDP. The four day deadline was so the Client could include the redesigned LDP in their budget and marketing roll out plan and published offering, allowing first course delivery in the fall of 2011.

When she came home, Lillas was both excited about the opportunity, and concerned about meeting the challenge of the short time line. She felt she needed some help in getting it done right.

On listening to her story, I too got excited. For the Program Manager’s request was what we had dreamt about for the past ten years in the co-creation of ILI. Our unfulfilled desire was to help an organization update or redesign an entire leadership curriculum with its foundations our integrative life and leadership approach. So both of us felt it was a wonderful opportunity that was totally aligned with ILI’s founding mission and vision.

To help Lillas with her challenge, I set my own agenda aside with Integrative Energy and Technologies, rescheduled meetings and conference calls, and committed to devote all my time and support to the program redesign from Tuesday to Thursday of that week. So early on Tuesday morning, with Lillas in her upstairs office and me in my downstairs office, we began the work.

For Lillas Marie, the redesign and program creation task was not new, nor conceptually difficult. For nearly 18 years, she had grown and evolved into one of the foremost leading edge Leadership Development Facilitators in Canada. In her tenure with the University of Saskatchewan as Director of Business and Leadership Development Programs (LDP) for 14 years, she led the start up operation, designed the program, and sourced the faculty for one of the most successful Leadership Programs in the Province of Saskatchewan that continues to be delivered to government, industry and academic entities to this day. The current redesign project would feature the best from her past, the most current thoughts on leadership available today, all in an effort to move the Client’s LDP to the next level of leadership in the future.

The next two days were intense, starting before 8:00 am in the morning and not finishing until after 8:00 pm at night. We would consult periodically through the day, conduct research in our library and on the internet—both individually and collectively—exchange drafts while proofing and critiquing them; work on co-creating the optional programs; and finally ended up with a product we were both satisfied and felt good about by late Wednesday night. Lillas submitted the final update/redesign that evening and scheduled a meeting with the Program Manager for Thursday morning for the first review. If there were changes coming out of that morning meeting, they could be worked on and completed in another 24 hour cycle in order to meet the Friday deadline.

At the Thursday morning conference call, the Program Manager, after reviewing Lillas’ submission, said to Lillas, “Do you hear me singing, Lillas? Can you feel me dancing? This is exactly what we were looking for!”

You have a conceptual framework that we were missing that holds the whole leadership program together. I see how you are moving from the personal to professional, from team to leading in the organization. We don't need to change a single word of it! It is perfect. I think we will launch in the fall of 2011 and have the summer to build the courses that make up the new and improved Leadership Development Program.”

On reflection, even though we worked hard for two days, often forgetting to take breaks and eat, Lillas and I were in a state of flow. Our vision, mission, passion and actions were totally in alignment with the task we were given to accomplish. We felt like we were firing on all four domains (or cylinders) of our being; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. And it felt good to use our inspirations and intuitions, our insights and intelligence; and our instincts and experience in turning out the final redesigned and updated LDP.

Curiously, we were not tired, drained or exhausted after the marathon, but excited about what we were able to accomplish in such a short time. And from the Clients perspective, the product was perfect, which validated our feeling of being in a state of flow and made the effort all worthwhile.

APPLICATION: This week, take a moment to reflect on: “When was the last time you felt in flow?” Then, try and pay attention to where and when you feel you have this integrative energy this coming week. And when you find it, seek to follow it wherever it leads. When you feel this integrative energy, it is a sign you are aligned in living your purpose, contributing your gifts, being of service, often while immersed in a challenging, creative and vital life giving place in time and space.

INSPIRATION: Quotes from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: (1) *“To know oneself is the first step toward making flow a part of one's entire life. But just as there is no free lunch in the material economy, nothing comes free in the psychic one. If one is not willing to invest psychic energy in the internal reality of consciousness, and instead squanders it in chasing external rewards, one loses mastery of one's life, and ends up becoming a puppet of circumstances.”* (2) *“If we know what that set point is, we can predict fairly accurately when you will be in flow, and it will be when your challenges are higher than average and skills are higher than average.”* (3) *“Even without success, creative persons find joy in a job well done. Learning for its own sake is rewarding.”*

INFORMATION: (1) **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, *“Good Business: Leadership, Flow, and the Making of Meaning, 2004.”* (2) **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, *“Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery & Invention, 1997.”* (3) **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, *“Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, 1990”.* (4) *Mihaly speaks about 7 ways to know when you are in Flow and describes a chart of high challenge and high skills that leads to a state of Flow.* http://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html. (5) *20 Questions to ask people about when they are in Flow:* <http://rhemagrouponline.com/samples/213.pdf>

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