

June 20th 2013

“Learn to Listen... Through the Pause”

Gabriella COLAO

I am a practitioner of *focusing*, always looking for interesting aspects and applications of this natural resource that we all have and can use in our daily life. I discovered that it's a fascinating possibility to live a life from a focusing perspective. My profession as a legal advisor with an International Organisation gives me many chances to see the potential of this.

In my vision I had sensed the impact at institutional level, but still I was digging in my inner space to find a personal way ahead. Reading a past newsletter of the Focusing Institute from last year I made an incredible discovery about a trainer of the Institute. William Hernandez was currently working in the human development sector, using the revolutionary pause as a model targeted to vulnerable communities in Ecuador.

The concept was very intriguing for me, as my focus is Humanitarian Law and the controversial topic of war and peace. I attempted to contact him with the aim of understanding more about the application of this model as a community “strategy” for non violent communication. He replied, and with his natural and cordial attitude briefly described his approach to focusing through the pause. He also asked me if I wanted immediately to see how the felt sense “happens” through the pause with a quick exercise. It worked so well. I was surprised by the simplicity of the process: it got me very interested. Simple and direct! The revolutionary pause!

I found myself thinking about the uniqueness of this essential teaching. In different cultures and environments it really tells you that simplicity is the great revolution the world is expecting! With two other members of the focusing community in Naples, Roberta De Bury and Chiara Catapano, we organised two workshops. William offered to come to Naples with another expert, Soti Grafanaki, a professor of counselling and spirituality at St. Paul's University in Ottawa, Canada. “*Learn to Listen... Through the Pause*”, was the topic of the two workshops held in Naples, Italy on 8-9 June 2013. 60 people participated in two four hour workshop sessions. Most of them had no previous knowledge at all of focusing.

It has been an incredible and stimulating experience for each of us. Through a number of simple exercises we were immediately in touch, not only with our felt sense through the pause, but also experiencing how easy it is to rush into a response before interacting. Indeed we faced our ordinary habit of action-reaction with just an hyphen in-between, of letting our automatism drive our decisions and interactions, of living a life in our mind through assumptions rather than having a broader source of interested attention to the people and the environment.

We allowed ourselves freedom through the pause before acting, and care for the other person by looking, sensing and feeling the other. Catching the eyes you had never looked into before, experiencing your inner presence while immediately connecting to the other person's larger body language, sensing a new level of trust growing from these interactions. All of these discoveries unveiled the perception of

what life could be, if only we allowed our mind not to be fenced in by limitations and assumptions, criticism or judgments and most of all not being limited to a life at the speed of the thought, but of the body.

We all felt a powerful potential emerging in our personal life. We sensed the great impact of the idea on the literacy of the felt sense. Most of the participants felt a strong curiosity to explore this “something” that it was somehow familiar, implicit as Gendlin would describe. That something there in your body! It was unexpectedly new! The way the pause unfolded new patterns and new ways of connecting to the world was amazingly beautiful and quick. We re-discovered the power of silence, giving a new sense of authority to the body. For some participants it has been challenging. It was by some means difficult to keep eye contact in silence. To their surprise it didn’t take long to enjoy it. There were a lot of questions from the participants, lots of comments. Many people shared experiences and feelings in an intimate atmosphere, a surprising process to happen with people you don’t know and have only recently met. It was so natural. And I am happy to say that those who had arrived with a doubtful smile left with a gift: the gift of the pause, the gift of freedom.

There is more to this pleasant discovery. We all sensed that the pause can be a great social factor of happiness. I have been looking into this aspect for a long time, searching for a language that has not yet been used in institutional processes. Many times I wondered if it ever existed. We are used to building peace through technique and complex tactics of negotiation or behaviours, and there is nothing wrong with that! But as an experienced professional in this I know that if you don’t believe in what you say you will experience a distinctive message through your body. It picks up more about the whole situation than you can imagine.

I can now see how easy it is to connect to other people at a different level, not tactically, not strategically, but in a natural way by pausing. There is such a great potential in exploring the social pause. We are all very grateful to William and Soti for showing us how we can simply pause, it’s natural and easy, it’s like breathing. Nobody has to teach us to inhale. We simply do it. But how you do it makes the difference in the quality of your life. This is what the workshops have introduced us to, to a new quality of inter-human attention. We are grateful for this invitation to pause and experience. It has opened to the door to curiosity. It has empowered us. On the other hand it has given us a new level of responsibility. We are now conscious that an incredible resource is there. It’s available for us as individuals and as a community. As William said, *“the idea is that “the pause” is an extraordinary opportunity for us to build bridges with kindred spirits”*. Isn’t this what the world needs?