

Rank Awareness and Conflict in
the Workplace:
It Takes a Village

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Abstract

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by

Tom Esch

Traditional African wisdom teaches us in the west that it takes a village to raise a child. This village metaphor can also be applied to the process of rank awareness—it can take a “village” to raise a person’s awareness of their rank and power. The village I am primarily referring to is my work place and the person I am referring to is me. My work-village has been my alarm clock, waking me up again and again to my unconscious behavior related to my rank. The experience of being woken up from my rank-slumber has not been pleasant or easy, but it has been transformative. This project is the result of what I learned in the process of waking up. 2007 and 2008 were especially stressful years for us at work because of a falling economy and my decision to take significant time away from the job to complete my MACF degree. Too often during those years I did not use my rank with awareness in company meetings and interpersonal encounters. Those moments and the painful conflicts which erupted from them sparked my interest in studying rank and provided me with a living laboratory to conduct the research. What you will read here is my journey into the dynamic and at times alarming relationship between rank awareness and conflict. Enjoy the ride and remember, whenever rank is used consciously and compassionately the whole “village” is positively impacted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Failure is the key to the kingdom within.”

Jalal al-Din Rumi, 13th century Persian poet (Rumi 1997, 91).

Genesis of this Project

This project evolved organically out of my experience facilitating meetings at work. My brother hired me some years ago to manage the warehouse at his company. I was aware that our fraternal relationship would create some challenges for both of us, but had no idea that I would receive an advanced education from the local “village” in the dynamics of rank, in part because of that relationship.

About 6 months into the job I noticed that my brother was facilitating all of our company meetings. He is a very good facilitator and yet it was clear to me that he could contribute more to the meetings if he were free from that role. I enjoy facilitating meetings and I asked if he would let me take that role. He said yes and I immediately picked up that role and have been doing it for most of our meetings ever since.

It is a privilege to facilitate our company meetings, though we rarely would deviate from the written agenda and work at a deeper level with the differences among us. So in time I became somewhat bored with our meetings and eventually began to consider what might be involved in creating a new career for me. At that point I learned of the MACF program and before I knew it I was accepted into the 2006 MACF class—Cohort 2.

The opportunity presented by the chance to be part of the MACF highlighted the tension inherent in the complex dual role relationship with my brother: I am his brother and his employee; he is my brother and my boss. And to complicate matters, or perhaps balance them, I am the elder

brother and he is the younger brother. And up until my decision to study for the MACF the tension within that dual role reality felt mostly manageable.

When I was about half way into my 3 year program I asked my brother if I had his support to begin to practice Process Work, in small doses, at company meetings. I explained that I would be making interventions, from time to time, inviting the group to work with differences among us as they emerged. He gave me the OK to use Process Work during work meetings and I did my best to bring my learning into the company. Many of my attempts to intervene and support our working with differences did not go well. Part of the reason I failed often is that I am still learning this complex art of Process Work. The other part is that the field in which I am facilitating is complex and full of land mines: I am the brother of the boss and one of the few at work interested in working more directly with conflict at our company meetings. This combination of factors made it extra challenging to use my rank consciously and was, in and of itself, at times too much for the group.

In October 2008, we had two super intense and emotionally dramatic meetings at work which shook my core identity and deeply disturbed several of my co-workers. In some moments of accusation and verbal attack hurtful things were spoken. Some demanded apology and reparation. I was named the cause of the problem. What unfolded at these gatherings was disturbing and opened up a whole new kingdom inside of me. Some of the details will be covered in Case #5 in Chapter 5.

What became clear, as a result of those two meetings and several conversations in between them, was my failure to be awake to the force of my own rank. Furthermore I was not very skillful as a facilitator in moments of accusation and verbal attack. I had said some words which

were hurtful to others and was unaware of it. This experience was a deeply painful experience that made it relatively easy to choose a focus for my final project. In short I felt like a failure.

I hate failure; it is one of my least favorite subjects. And failure rarely feels like a key to the inner kingdom or any kingdom. But in this case my failure was a key part of finding a clear focus for my project: rank awareness and how it impacts conflict.

Contribution to Process Work

The notion of rank appears frequently in the Process Work literature, often in bits and pieces. That literature lacks a longer and more experiential exploration of rank. It is my hope that this paper will partially fill that void. And what may be unique in this project is my willingness to showcase and analyze a variety of experiences, including a few of my least skillful moments.

My village, comprised of co-workers, classmates, and Process Work teachers, woke me up to the force and use of my rank and to the underlying factors shaping my behavior. Because of this village of support and challenge I have learned a lot about how rank functions at my place of work. I have also learned that significant learning can come from failure especially if the person misusing their rank has enough outside and inside support.

It is my fervent intention that the failures and successes I was a part of, and the reflections upon them, may in a small fashion open up new pathways for future Process Work adventures. For those willing to go into relatively unexplored work place villages and into the shadowy recesses of their souls, I say to you: go boldly and welcome failure as a friend; stay alert, and if they throw their shoes at you then either duck, like President George Bush did in 2008 when one got thrown at him in the Middle East, or catch the shoe and learn from it. A shoe will probably not kill you.

Audience

The primary audience for this project is the Process Work learning community. The secondary audience is friends and family who are curious about Process Work and about what I have been doing all this time. It is hoped that all who even skim it will find it interesting, meaningful and useful

Outline of Project

Chapter 1 offers an introduction, and Chapter 2 sets the frame by outlining the origins of Process Work and four foundational influences: physics, Jungian psychology, Taoism, and shamanism. Those with little theoretical or historical knowledge of Process Work will find this chapter informative while more experienced Process Work readers may want to skip this chapter. Chapter 3 describes some of the central Process Work theory on the subject of conflict. Chapter 4 describes the notion and types of rank and the meaning of rank awareness. Chapter 5, the main course offered here in terms of original research, recounts five stories from my village that go deeper into the jungle of rank awareness and conflict. Each story will have a bit of background, details pertaining to a piece or two of the main conflict, analysis, and conclusions. In Chapter 6 is a summary of the salient insights of the project. Included there are some final reflections about what went well and what did not go well with the project, followed by a chorus of critical questions. Four future projects are outlined that would continue the work begun here. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of Daniel Goleman's work on physiological effects stress and how his research relates to rank.

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

The aim of this project was twofold: (a) to study the way in which I came to greater consciousness of my rank at work and (b) to explain how rank awareness and conflict are related.

This section introduces the methodology I used and considerations I made in creating this project. First I will describe the approach I used for gathering, choosing and analyzing data, and then I will conclude with some ethical considerations related to a project of this type.

Approach

The approach I have chosen can be called experiential or heuristic. Given the audience, the subject matter and the purpose of this project, this seemed the most appropriate vehicle for communicating what I learned. Other approaches, such as the academic (quantitative or qualitative), educational, social action-oriented or creative approaches could have been utilized. But none of these were as well-suited for this project, because of my interests, the time constraints and the nature of studying oneself. As Lee Spark-Jones has written about the experiential approach:

This type of project describes and reflects on personal experience from a unique perspective, informed by Process Work theory and/or practice. An experiential project should give clear account of how Process Work contributes to the study of personal experience, and the gap in existing knowledge it seeks to fill, as well as questions it raises and avenues it suggests for further research. (Spark, 2007, p. 19)

This study of my own rank awareness, or lack thereof, is well-suited for the experiential approach because it requires personal reflection from a unique perspective. My unique perspective has multiple layers: I am attempting to use Process Work in a highly competitive sales environment that has little interest in things like feelings, process and sensitivity; I am in a dual role as an employee and a brother of the boss; and finally, I am willing to share details of both my successes and my failures.

Method of gathering data

As mentioned earlier, I have documented scenes from more than 30 meetings or encounters in the span of 14 months. Most of what you will read about happened at meetings

while I was facilitating, some moments occurred with just one or two others apart from the company meeting time. I made notes about what happened as soon as possible after the encounter or meeting, though it was not always possible to jot down notes immediately after significant encounters. I could not always remember a verbatim account, so at times I have taken the liberty to let my creative memory imagine what happened. However, for the most part, particular words, phrases and group dynamics were captured fairly accurately from my viewpoint.

Choosing and analysis of the data

I chose meetings or encounters where my use of rank had a big impact on what occurred. Sometimes my words and actions had a positive impact, other times they exacerbated or caused the conflict which unfolded.

After each meeting or encounter I worked with myself and my teachers, to understand more deeply what happened and to gain ideas for effective follow-up. In some cases I went back to a person or group and attempted to repair some damage that I had inadvertently done or talk to them about how I had experienced them and needed from them in the future. Often the follow-up conversations were transformative, because in most cases I was using my rank differently than I had in the heat of the moment. Some of the follow up experiences, personal changes in me and shifts in the work environment were also recorded.

For each case in Chapter 4, I give some history, present a summary of the key moments and analyze it from a Process Work perspective. I finish each case with conclusions and a summary of the learning.

The reader should understand that despite significant preparation and my best efforts, sometimes things did not go very well for me (or the group). Often, in the midst of a heated conversation, I truly felt like a beginner and at times even a failure. In some cases it required

substantial inner work to begin to see how I was not using my rank constructively. And also sometimes things went very well. As Rumi says, “Sometimes you are in control and things work out. That is because if you were always failing you might give up” (Rumi, 1991, p. 62).

Ethical Considerations

This is a public document. Therefore the main ethical considerations are to protect the identities of the workers and the well-being of the company. To that end, all names of workers except mine of course, have been changed and situations have been altered to maintain as much anonymity as possible.

The focus here is mostly on me and my use or misuse of rank. Other individuals come into the stories mainly to illustrate how I responded to them or to make clear how they were stepping into certain roles. I have done my best to not shed negative light on anyone, except myself. Where I felt it was necessary to mention something critical of another person I did so only to the extent where it was necessary to outline the essence of the process and where possible I have asked for and obtained explicit permission from the person involved.

Limits of This Project

The primary limit to this project is that only one person (me) is observing and documenting how rank awareness impacts relationships with co-workers and the entire work-atmosphere. The upshot is that this is an incredibly subjective study: me studying mostly my experience and use of rank at work.

I have also limited the academic research side of the project. I did not do major reading outside of the Process Work lexicon to compare and contrast the Process Work approach to rank and conflict with other approaches.

Furthermore I chose to not discuss all the major aspects of Process Work theory as they relate to rank and conflict. I include working with accusations/attacks, roles and ghost roles, primary and secondary processes, and taking sides in a conflict. Therefore I did not really cover other important Process Work concepts such as the dreambody, following the Tao, inner work, and the importance of facilitator metaskills.

As I wrote this paper I realized the elusiveness of rank. This is surely a limit. Rank is not visible to the eye but lives in the momentary interstices—inside of and in-between people. Some rank is conferred externally and some is more internally forged. And most people have rank in more than one category. So there is a real challenge to studying something so complex and hard to see, especially if the person studying it (me) has high rank in almost every category possible.

I am focusing on the rank dynamics in myself and not on the rank use of others. Occasionally their contributions come in peripherally, when necessary. In choosing to focus on me I have limited the analysis portions of the cases in Chapter 4. There is more going on than I have reported, and in the other roles apart from mine. But I deliberately have only waded up to my ankles in that stream, to protect my co-workers and stay focused on my learning. In protecting them I realize that I lose the full depth and lessons contained in the cases.

Chapter 2: Process Work Origins and Foundations

The story of the creation of Process Work is fascinating. It has emerged from the eclectic background of Dr. Arnold Mindell and his experiments with himself, his students, and friends over many years. Though many people and experiences have contributed to this amazing work it is generally thought that the four foundational influences are theoretical physics, Jungian psychology, Taoism, and shamanism. I will briefly examine these four influential foundations and the ideal of deep democracy in this chapter.

Theoretical Physics and Jungian Psychology

Mindell developed what was first called Process Oriented Psychology in the 1970s and 1980s as a natural extension of his formal studies in theoretical physics and Jungian psychology. As a graduate student in physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1961, he travelled to Switzerland to conduct research at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic Institute. Not long after arriving he complained to his roommate that he was having bad dreams. In order to work with his dreams he began therapy with Marie Louise von Franz, one of Dr. Carl Jung's most devoted students and a leading Jungian analyst in Zurich. Mindell's training in science predisposed him to be skeptical of dreams but at the same time, he was incredibly fascinated by them. This new world of symbols and dreams captured him and he abandoned his formal studies in physics and entered the Jung Institute to become a Jungian analyst.

During his studies in Zurich, Jung's nephew, Dr. Franz Riklin became one of Mindell's favorite teachers. A seminal moment occurred for Mindell at a large gathering in Zurich in 1969. Riklin, who was then the President of the Jung Institute, was standing for and defending some of the views of his teacher, C.G. Jung, during a period when Riklin felt Jung was being

misunderstood. Riklin was strongly verbally attacked by some of his colleagues. He was so upset by the conflict that he retired to a back room and suffered a heart attack which led to his death a few weeks later. Saddened by the loss of his teacher, Mindell thought that there must be a better way to stand for your viewpoint publicly and survive. This moment set in motion Mindell's desire to create something like worldwork, and even played a role in his thinking about the concept of rank awareness. (This story is used with permission. It was told by Joe Goodbread, Fall Residency 2006, and confirmed through an email with Arnold Mindell, April 28, 2009.)

Riklin's colleagues did not use their rank with consciousness or compassion. This event was a very sad and painful experience for all those who knew Riklin in the academic world of Jungian psychology at the time. It was a moment pregnant with the seeds of grief and transformation, which I imagine Mindell experienced deeply.

Mindell ended up writing his thesis on Jung's theory of synchronicity, or the theory of nonlocal connections. He explored how one's inner experience could be connected non-locally to outer events through meaning. Though he was solidly grounded in Jungian psychology, with its heavy emphasis on the importance of dreams, Mindell wanted to ground his on-going work in more observable and physical realities. He also did not believe that things happening in the human body were pathological but rather packed with meaning. So he began studying and integrating physical symptoms into his experiments:

As a Jungian analyst, Mindell was committed to Jung's teleological approach, the idea that dreams had a meaning or purpose. He thought that body symptoms, like dreams, must contain meaning and purpose for the individual. In his words, "I could never completely buy the idea of pathology. After studying Jungian psychology you have the idea, or rather the experience, that events are meaningful. ... Since I've always considered my dreams meaningful, I thought that maybe what happening in my body was meaningful too, not pathological or wrong." (Diamond & Jones, 2004, pp. 3-4)

Process Work and Taoism

Process Work is strongly influenced by the eastern-based philosophy called Taoism. Taoism holds that what is happening in any given moment is *exactly* what is supposed to be happening. This is an easy belief to have when things are going your way. It is harder to believe when difficult things happen to you or the ones you love. When an excruciating event occurs in your life, it is challenging to accept it as part of the plan. Yet we also know that if we fight the natural flow of life, if we resist what is our troubles only increase: “Resisting change or struggling against the Tao creates tensions and difficulties” (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 17).

However, it may also be true that those in the midst of a difficult season or moment in their life may need some outside support in order to achieve the most positive outcome possible. Just because you are a Taoist, does not mean you do nothing when someone is in distress. The task of the Process Worker is to accurately see the flow of what is happening and then follow that movement with eyes wide open and antenna fully extended. The faithful facilitator, using this approach, knows they will be called to perceive the tiniest flicker of movement and adjust accordingly. In an interview with Rob Henderson in 2005, Mindell spoke about the importance of Taoism and its ineffable essence:

The most important part of the work is Taoism. It is the core of the work, the element shared with Jung's work. The Tao's mysterious impulses I experience as sudden tiny sensations in my body which cannot be comprehended at first, or they appear in the world around me. The Tao which cannot be said, the signals I can identify and share with others, guide me through my day, but when I don't know where to go, or feel lost, the instantaneous, sentient, subtle sensations and signals of the moment are a constant guide. I am happiest when I am a devout Taoist, following nature's path, and less comfortable, directing and knowing what life is about. When I don't know something, I wait for a way to be revealed.

This watching, waiting and following what is in front of us is radically natural and incredibly challenging, especially in the midst of conflict. Our fast-paced, results-oriented culture

makes Taoism even more radical. I can personally say with great conviction that I am in my best moments a Taoist-kindergartener.

Shamanism

Shaman and Shamanism are collective terms that refer to traditions of spirituality and healing in indigenous cultures from virtually every corner of the world. The shaman can be a woman or man and is someone who is a close observer of what is occurring in the present moment. The shaman is also able to access deeper internal psychological processes often referred to as non-ordinary reality. Through a process some call divination they take a question, their own or someone else's, and journey to the non-ordinary reality and bring back answers that may not make sense to themselves, but have meaning to the questioner.

The shaman has the ability to move fluidly from the world of dreams to the world of spirit and back to the ordinary world. This ability combined with their skill at observing what we would call "process," makes them skilled facilitators. They are a rich resource for the local community, especially when there is illness, trouble, or division of any sort. Perhaps they can see more deeply into the situation and can bring forth a necessary transformation. The shaman can see multiple roles and dynamics beneath the surface of a conflict or a relationship. Arnold Mindell and his wife Amy have been privileged to work with and learn from shamans from African, Australia, and other places. They posit that shamanism has a lot to offer Process Work:

Shamans must pay attention to unusual events in themselves, their clients, and the environment. Since a shaman must be able to lead a normal everyday life, she also develops attention to everyday reality, a focus that Don Juan calls the "first attention." But the shaman must develop the attention for unusual processes—namely the "second attention," which perceives the dreaming process. (Mindell, 1993, p. 23)

Process Work, at its best, has a shamanistic quality to it. When the facilitator can see what is happening with both their first and second attention the group, couple or person who is seeking

help is in good hands. This is a perspective that goes beyond psychology, physics, or Taoism.

Shamanism is a foundational concept in Process Work that connects and includes the entire field:

inner work, dreams, healing, bodies, spirits, relationships, community, and more.

Deep Democracy

Deep democracy is a philosophy within Process Work that supports bringing out all the different perspectives in a given field or group of people. All the roles are valued and needed when deep democracy is practiced fully, even the ones we would rather not look at or listen to.

Deep democracy also includes the idea that awareness is more important than power in working through differences. “Awareness is a more comprehensive guiding principle than power”

(Mindell, 2002, p. 10).

Deep democracy is not just about how awareness affects politics; it is connected to “inner democracy.” Inner democracy happens when we include a wide expanse of perspectives internally for the purpose of having a more expanded facility to work with others who may be acting one-sided. We act one-sided when we only see or speak from one position. We tend to become over-identified with that one perspective. Being one sided, common as it is for all of us, is the nemesis of Process Work and on the far side of the continuum, away from deep democracy.

The commonly practiced principle of “majority rule” does not reflect the essence of deep democracy. Deep democracy, as contrasted with regular democracy, attempts to include all possible perspectives about a particular topic or idea for the benefit of genuine change. The theory beneath deep democracy is that a change is more likely to happen when many perspectives or roles are expressed and supported to come forth, especially those which are unpleasant or disturbing.

Deep democracy, in practice, can be painfully slow. This may be excruciating, especially for social activists who want things to happen as soon as possible and may not be as interested in awareness. But the idea of a deeper kind of democracy—though in some sense still a dream—is inspiring and is, in fact, often more powerful than law. Deep democracy is about changing hearts and minds, not just external behavior. Amy Mindell writes about Arnold, her husband, and his dream of deep democracy:

Arnold realized that democracy is, in essence, a dream still trying to happen. His concept of “deep democracy” (1992) states that *awareness* is needed to literally bring democracy’s most cherished beliefs and ideals to life both in the private and political arenas. Without awareness, political discourse, social action, community meetings, and city forums run the danger of striving for outer change while potentially replicating history.....laws can be passed to outlaw racism or other forms of discrimination, yet if our hearts and minds are not changed as well, and if we are not aware of the subtle ways in which we influence one another in our moment-to-moment interactions, then even the best laws can only cover over deep-seated conflicts and wounds. (Mindell, Amy, 2008, pp. 216-217)

Deep democracy or inner democracy begins at home, within the mind of the person seeking it. It is common for us to marginalize certain parts of ourselves. We all can be tyrants with our own ideas, criticizing perspectives that come up freely and promoting other thoughts as “better.” As we learn to welcome all our internal “guests,” especially the disruptive ones, we are more likely to welcome the disruptive “guests” who show up in groups. This is a necessary skill for any facilitator.

When I was at the first MACF residency in Yachats, Oregon, Mindell told a story which said a lot about how to model inner democracy. He was scheduled to work with a group of mental health workers. He arrived and opened the door of the room where they had gathered. As he stepped into the room one of the leaders said to him, “Get out of here we don’t need you.” Mindell paused and said, “I feel like I am going to cry now.” He continued, “And if I am going to cry everyone else may want to cry, under your domination.” A woman spoke up and said “Yes, he

is cruel, can you do something? That is how he treats us too.” Mindell said, “I can’t deal with someone as powerful as that, I am a weakling ... I only have feelings.” It was the beginning of a significant conversation. And somehow things worked out. They allowed him to stay and work with them (Mindell, September 2006, used with permission).

In this brief encounter we see profound deep-internal democracy being practiced. Mindell had to be internally familiar with the following roles to be skilled in that moment: the leader who is mean and bossy; the victim who feels put down by the mean leader; the whole group who may have a diversity of experiences related to the mean leader and the weakling who says “what can I do I only have feelings?” His reply to the leader who tried to get him to leave looks simple and almost easy to do, but it actually represents a very high level of mastery.

Conflict is more likely to be effectively worked through if the facilitator, or others in the group, has the ability to welcome a wide variety of perspectives and experiences both in themselves and into the room. This could include things like meanness, anger and altered states. This welcoming attitude of deep democracy, this profound willingness to include is communicated potently in Rumi’s poem “The Guesthouse.” Rumi was a 13th century Persian poet who has become very popular in the west. This poem represents a metaphor that many Process Work teachers have used and pointed to as representing an attitude to aim at when working in troubled situations.

This being human is a guesthouse.
 Every morning a new arrival.
 A joy, a depression, a meanness,
 Some momentary awareness comes
 as an unexpected visitor.
 Welcome and entertain them all!
 Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows
 who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture,
 still, treat each guest honorably.
 He may be clearing you out

For some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond. (Rumi, 1997, p. 109)

Summary

Process Work grew out of physics, Jungian psychology, Taoism, and the eclectic personality of Arnold Mindell and his friends. Mindell's interest in grounding Jungian dreamwork in the physical symptoms, coupled with his knowledge of physics and a disciplined interest in Taoism and shamanism, has proven to be an interesting stew in which the work has been cooking for at least three decades. From the belief that what happens in a body might not be sick or wrong has sprung many insights and transformative moments. It has shaped an attitude of curiosity and acceptance in which many wounds and symptoms have been cradled and sometimes healed.

The evolution of Process Work—from small and bold experiments in Zurich to the Worldwork event in London in April 2008 that drew over 400 attendees from over 40 countries who came together to have profound and transformative conversations—has been amazing. Practitioners of Process Work believe what Mindell thought in the aftermath of the tragic death of Dr. Riklin in Zurich: there has to be a better way. And that better way is the path of awareness, being able to sober up from the inebriating power of rank and wake up to a more authentic, sensitive and powerful way of being.

Chapter 3: Process Work and Conflict Theory

Most of us would agree that conflict is an unpleasant thing. And it is a natural human tendency to want to avoid unpleasant things. It seems better to just let the trouble alone. Joe Goodbread reminds us that we do have good reasons to avoid conflict:

Avoidance is the number one way of dealing with conflict, especially in our personal lives. It is not difficult to understand why many of us would rather give in to our opponents than get into conflicts with them. We have precious few examples of conflicts that end well, leaving our lives better off than before. Even minor conflicts tend to spiral out of control until one or both participants get hurt, either emotionally or physically. (Goodbread, 2007, p. 8)

Those who practice Process Work, inspired by the idea that there has to be a better way, attempt to work constructively with conflict. What follows is a brief survey of the central ideas about conflict taken from the Process Work tapestry of literature.

Attitude and Approach Toward Conflict

The attitude and approach taken by those who practice Process Work is one of curiosity and a willingness to engage with the sources of the conflict, “...engaging in heated conflict, instead of running away from it is one of the best ways to resolve the divisiveness that prevails on every level of society—in personal relationships, business and the world” (Mindell, 1995, p. 12).

Conflict is addressed and dealt with mainly through the power of awareness. Conflict, whether between two individuals or within a group, is a usually result of people not using their awareness more skillfully. Through creating shared awareness, even intractable conflict can at times be worked with effectively. “Awareness inevitably reveals the new steps that can transform even intractable conflict” (Mindell, 2002, p. 9).

When working with conflict we are willing to move towards the center of it, with awareness. Sometimes this may feel like we are stepping in front of a speeding train. But it is an

effective way to get nearer to the source of the differences in order to understand what is happening and intervene more meaningfully. It means “sitting in the fire,” or being willing to stay close to the heat. Mindell liked this metaphor so much that it is the title for one of his most widely read publications (Mindell, 1995).

The idea of moving towards conflict is counterintuitive and an action most of us would prefer not to take. Yet, in Process Work we are taught that we can keep ourselves and others relatively safe by using awareness. We use every input available—visual, verbal, and auditory signals, intuition, our own proprioceptive feelings and dreams—to increase our understanding and protection, for we are not interested in being injured physically or emotionally. We are interested in creating safety as we work with the trouble in front of us.

We do not promise miracles or guarantee resolution of conflict. Resolution is what most people want when they are in the middle of a difficult conflict. But a primary goal of Process Work is not resolution but rather interaction. Interaction involves getting all the various roles and perspectives out in the open and relating to each other. This goal is a very ambitious since in a climate of conflict it is likely that some of the roles are hidden or have never openly related to each other. Some roles (or people) would be likely to hurt each other without at least one alert, facilitative person in the room.

When the various and sometimes hidden parts begin to interact and relate, something surprising and positive frequently happens. And at times real miracles, such as resolution, do occur. This process of bringing out the different perspectives in a tense climate requires artful facilitation and keen awareness.

Inner Work and Conflict

Inner work is part of what leads to the keen awareness needed to make Process Work doable (Jan Dworkin, personal communication, April 2009). When you are triggered by something you may react too strongly in a given situation. You might say and do hurtful things. You may need help. You can access some help by doing inner work with the support of others or alone. The wisdom lives within. Your task is to find it and mine it. This can happen with role playing, coaching, counseling, journaling or any other creative way to process the roles that are present and work with the edges and disturbers that are troubling you.

Inner work is based in the belief that the conflict “out there” is also “in here.” The conflict that seems only outside of you is also in the field around you or in the broader world. You can work on the field by working on yourself, especially if the person who brings up the conflict is not willing to work with you:

Confrontation and direct action are also necessary, but in situations where they do not work, or where they merely aggravate an already inflamed conflict, we have no choice but to work on the problem internally, to change the outer situation by changing the inner one. (Mindell, 1995, p. 80)

Conflict and Field Theory

When a conflict happens at work, or anywhere, the gossip frequently centers on the person being viewed as “the problem.” People may say things like: “If they just had not said that there would be no trouble.” Or “If so and so were not here we would not have these problems.” These comments, viewed through a Process Work lens, may not be complete or accurate assessments of what is really happening. In the Process Work approach conflict is generally not viewed as the result of one person’s actions or words. If the person is removed, or “fixed,” more often than not, the trouble remains. The one who appears to be the source of the disturbance is in fact seen as a vital and valuable part of the change process, not primarily an element to eliminate. “The

problem” is usually systemic and the one person who looks like the “trouble” the one willing to disturb the system may actually be the beginning of the remedy. Sometimes that person is like a dose of the remedy needed to bring healing to the system. Though that individual may need some facilitative support in making their “medicine” more effective they are nevertheless a key part of the change process.

Conflict does not happen in a vacuum or with just a single person, it occurs in a group or in a “field.” The term “field” is a term borrowed from physics and is defined by Mindell as “the atmosphere or climate of any community, including its physical, environmental and emotional surroundings” (Mindell, 1995, p. 42). A field does not just refer to a group or a community; it can also be the atmosphere or climate between two persons.

It is no accident that Mindell’s masters in physics from MIT was in the law of thermodynamics. In Process Work we pay keen attention to the flow of heat or energy in a group or organization. We view fields as a biologist views an atom—protons and neutrons are bouncing all around. Energy is moving in many directions, frequently at the same time, or perhaps energy is not moving at all. The job for the Process Work facilitator, much like a doctor of acupuncture, is to track the energy, see where it may be blocked and do what is necessary, within the willingness and contributions of those involved, to get things flowing again.

The flow of energy within a field cannot be fully tracked by a camera. Dreaming and other nonlinear realities are a very important part of making sense of what is happening. Mindell, though grounded in science, has long been captivated by the dreaming aspect of life. In Process Work we pay attention to night dreams and day dreams, for both have clues for finding meaning and resolution to conflict.

Fields may be invisible to the naked eye, yet they appear in the dreams of individuals, in the stories people tell about their groups, and even in the myths of nations. Individuals and

groups are the battleground for the characters in the myths to complete their mythical conflicts. It is this dreamlike nature of fields that makes it so difficult for ecologists, economists and politicians to deal with the world, because it is only partly organized by causal influences. The world is also organized by no causal influences, by the dreaming field, and we need to be shamans and visionaries as well as politicians and scientists to solve the world's problems." (Mindell, 1992, p. 25)

Types of Conflict

Conflict happens in a myriad of ways and yet tends to occur in just four general contexts: with one person (internally); between two persons; within a group (more than two persons); and between groups (e.g., rival businesses, gangs, or warfare among or within a nation). From the Process Work point of view, the essence of conflict and the forces that shape it do not really change whether it happens inside one person, between two persons, within a group or between groups.

At my work place the types of conflict that I have learned most from can be narrowed down to the second and third types: (a) conflict that happened with one other person and me, which I will refer to as "two-party conflict" and (b) conflict that took place in a group setting and clearly involved more than two parties, which I shall call "group conflict." This second type, which happens within groups, is not to be confused with what many process workers know of as "group process" which involves a group of people willing to work on their differences with a trained facilitator. This more traditional notion of "group process" has recognizable elements to it, such as sorting, consensus, identifying roles, et cetera. Internal conflict is an important and common type of conflict, but I will not be covering it here. More will be said on two-party and group conflict in Chapter 4 when we look at the cases.

Chapter 4: Rank: A Power that Can Ignite or Dull the Senses

Rank is present whenever human beings interact. Mindell defines rank as the “sum of a person’s privileges” (Mindell, 1995, p. 28) and defines it as a “conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power arising from culture, community support, personal psychology or spiritual power” (Mindell, 1995, p. 42). Rank has to do with privilege and power; specifically rank is about how privilege and power influence human relationships. It is not exactly the same thing as power, but it is close. Rank is about how power is used with others.

Recently while I was visiting my son’s second grade class I had an opportunity to notice rank impacting an everyday situation. I was walking down the hall and saw a boy, about 5 years old, walking on his toes in an erratic fashion using a little walker. He was shouting down the hallway to another child who was walking slowly towards him, “Hurry up. Hurry up! Hurry up!!!” His tone was urgent and escalating. I was next to the boy walking slowly and I bent down to him and gently said, “I think he wants you to hurry up.” The boy began running towards the other. This little scene was an example of rank in action. The slow walking boy probably had more contextual rank than the other and did not respond to his urgent shouts. However, as an adult, I had more rank than either and it was easy to use it for the benefit of the boy with the disability. In this case my request ignited a quick response.

Four Types of Rank: Social, Psychological, Spiritual, and Contextual

Three types of rank are defined in Process Work literature. They are social, psychological and spiritual. A fourth type of rank, contextual rank, has been included by some teachers and practitioners as the theory of Process Work as evolved (Dworkin, personal communication during private sessions, 2008-09).

Most rank tends to be either earned or unearned. Social rank tends to be unearned and conferred by the social culture. Psychological rank and spiritual rank are more likely to be earned by the individuals' responses to life's challenges. Contextual rank, being a latter addition, tends to be both earned and given (Jan Dworkin, personal communication, April 2009). The four types of rank are detailed below using Stephen Schuitevoerder's work that is a thorough and clear summation of Arnold Mindell's theory on rank. I have slightly adapted the format and simplified his work here.

Social Rank

This form of rank is the ranking bestowed by the culture and society we live in. It embraces the value system as well as the biases and prejudices of the mainstream society, and bestows more privileges to some people and less to others. In many western societies certain standard attributes are favored and have more rank. These include (Mindell, 1995):

- Skin color. The lighter the skin, the more favorable the rank.
- Gender. Men are given more social rank than women. Those who identify with a gender as different from their culturally given or physiologically defined gender, such as transsexuals, are given least rank.
- Sexual Orientation. Heterosexuals are given more recognition, rank and support than homosexuals and bisexual people.
- Economic class. The more wealth one has, the more affluent the neighborhood one lives in, the larger the house, etc., the more rank one is given.
- Education. Those who have higher learning are given more rank and financial recognition.
- Religion. In each society certain religions are favored while others are less encouraged or even oppressed. In most western cultures Christian based religions have more rank.
- Age. In many western countries respect towards the needs of older people and very young children are not well recognized. Youth is admired and younger bodies and presentations have more rank.
- Health. Those with differing or alternative abilities have lesser rank and are not well accommodated. The more athletic one's body the greater the rank.
- Profession. Jobs requiring higher academic education, more linear thinking and less artistic ability generally confer more status and appreciation via financial recognition.
- Expertise. Wisdom is conferred to those who have prominent positions in a field rather than to those who might have gained expertise from significant life experience.....

Psychological Rank

Psychological rank occurs when you have developed internal resources and abilities so that you have greater personal comfort and ease in addressing challenging situations.

- This development might arise from personal psychological work where a greater familiarity with yourself in difficult life challenges occurs. An example of this was

presented in a lecture I attended by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. (1983) When she first started working with dying people, she was challenged in helping them deal with their impending death. She noticed that her patients felt a lot better after a certain cleaning woman had been in their rooms. So she asked the cleaning woman what she was doing that was helping these people. This woman mentioned that she was not afraid of death. She had so much experience with death that it had become an old friend. Her ease with death had helped those facing death work with it more easily.

- Psychological rank might also arise in learning skills to deal with having lower social rank and managing in the world under this condition. One example of having higher psychological rank due to less social rank was evident in a discussion I had with an African American male friend. We were discussing safety, and particularly the needs of a number of white people in a conflict seminar to feel safe. He mentioned that this need was based on rank. These people had sufficient social rank to come to expect safety wherever they went. As an African American he never felt safe and so could not rely on or expect the social situation to make him safe. He had developed psychologically so that he could stay awake and watch out for himself in difficult social situations. Keeping alert and watching his own back was a psychological rank he developed due to having less social rank.

Spiritual Rank

“Spiritual rank comes from a relationship to something divine or transcendent--gods, goddesses or spirits” (Mindell 1995, p. 62). It can occur naturally through personal spiritual training, or as a result of a reaction to having lesser social and psychological rank. It does not necessarily arise from religious practice or training, but rather from a connection to a divine or transcendental state which creates a detachment and experience of freedom outside of the wheel of ordinary life. Some examples here might be useful:

- In addressing a lesser psychological and social rank: A number of years ago I worked with a client who as a child had a horrendous history of systemic physical, sexual and emotional abuse. When working with her I was often struck by her wonderful sensitivity, caring and compassion in the midst of these painful experiences. One day at the beginning of a session she mentioned she had a message for me. It was from an angel who had been with her since she was 3 years old. This angel stayed with her through tremendous abuse, and has given her strength and a desire to live even in the terrible conditions of her childhood where she suffered greatly from having less social and psychological rank. This angel manifested in the aura of compassion and care which I felt so strongly when being with her. In the midst of all this abuse she had developed a spiritual rank which was secure and separate from the pain of her life. She has used this spiritual rank in her life to encourage other family members to become aware of the abusive history of their childhood and confront those who had abused them. (Schuitevoerder, 2000, pp. 103-106)

Contextual Rank

Now I will address contextual rank in my own words because it is not found in Stephen Schuitevoerder’s work. Contextual rank is similar to social rank but places more emphasis on the

influence of the context in which the interaction occurs. For example, in a given small business, the owner may be a woman who is also a minority by virtue of her race. While she has lower social rank than the Caucasian men who work for her, she has higher contextual rank because she is the boss. Her contextual rank entitles her to specific privileges which others may not enjoy. Similarly at a given church the ordained minister usually has higher contextual rank than the members by virtue of his position. Church members may tend to place the ministers point of view higher than those with less contextual rank. But in other settings, that minister would not necessarily have higher contextual rank than anyone else.

Like social rank, contextual rank tends to be shaped by external factors, but not entirely. The mechanic who becomes a top salesman and is eventually promoted to vice president of a small business has grown his contextual rank because of his skill and performance. His contextual rank is both earned and given.

An Example of Contextual Rank

At the Worldwork Seminar in London (April 2008), I witnessed contextual rank being used effectively, by a participant-facilitator, during an engagement with a very hot conflict. The benefits were immediately evident. A man had verbally attacked a woman during their small group time. The woman reported this to the larger group, over 400 people. She put him on the spot and he defended himself, which escalated the conflict. A dramatic and painful scene ensued. He could not seem to admit what he had done. They were stuck. The conflict went in various directions as others came into the conversation. The process revolved around stories of violence inflicted from one person to another, particularly violence against women by men. There was clear misuse of social rank on the part of the man. I was seated near him and felt very uncomfortable. No one seemed to know what to say or do. Finally, after almost 45 minutes of

struggling with the issue, Jan Dworkin who was also close to him, touched the man gently on the arm and whispered to him, “I think you have it within you to apologize.” Moments later he stood up and apologized from his heart, taking responsibility for what he had done. There were tears and the atmosphere changed. I cannot prove it but I believe that part of the reason he responded so well was the contextual rank that Jan has as a seasoned teacher in the Process Work community. The tension was not completely resolved and the injury not instantly healed, but both sides experienced a shift. It was a “Wow!” moment (Worldwork, London 2008, used with permission).

The Complexity of Rank

The four types of rank do not exist independently of each other; they are interrelated in a fluid and multidimensional fashion. Rank is fluid because depending on the circumstances one’s rank can change remarkably; rank is multidimensional because there are many factors which contribute to it. In the workplace, depending on your title and position, you might have higher contextual rank than a co-worker. But they might have higher psychological rank than you. It is possible that you have both higher and lower kinds of rank than others, and that they are in a similar situation with you. It is this sort of complexity that makes rank such an important and challenging force to work with, especially in a moment of conflict. Mindell wrote about this: “Rank implies power differences. Everyone has both more and less rank than someone else” (Mindell, 1995, p. 58). This is a complex idea, having both more and less of something.

Rank is about the access to privilege and power. “Depending on your position relative to others, you might have higher or lower rank on an attribute. The more rank you have, the more access you have to privilege and power in this area” (Schuitevoerder, 2000, p. 101). And conversely, the less rank you have the less access you have to privilege and power. People in organizations pay close attention to and are impacted by rank, especially those who have or

believe they have less of it. Ironically, those most likely to not see the force and importance of rank are those with the most of it. They tend to be the least conscious of rank.

Rank Awareness

Having rank is separate from being aware of the rank you have. Rank involves the power and privileges a person receives and/or earns; rank awareness is the consciousness a person demonstrates related to those powers and privileges.

We all have rank in whatever social or professional context we find ourselves. How we use our rank has a huge impact on how well we get along with others and how we navigate the turbulent waters of conflict. “We all have some form of rank. Our behavior shows how conscious we are of this rank. When we are heedless of rank, communications become confused and chronic relationship problems develop” (Mindell, 1995, p. 49).

Awareness is the most essential tool for working with our own rank and the rank of others at work. “The trouble is, most of us are aware only of the rank or power we do not have. We forget to notice the rank and power we do have” (Mindell, 1995, p. 58). Rank awareness informs the way we act, think, talk, move and/or interact with others. A person who does notice the rank they do have will be more conscious of the influence of their words and actions. They will notice how they are being received and how their actions affect others. They are often seen as being more authentic and diplomatic. If they do not have rank awareness and are unconscious of how their words, actions and attitudes affect others, they are more likely to misuse their rank. In the common parlance, this is known as being a jerk.

Rank and Double Signals

Double signals happen when we are not completely congruent in our communications with others. We say one thing with our words but communicate another thing with our body language,

tone of voice and/or attitude behind our words. We are not in alignment with ourselves. This could be because the real message is too much to admit to ourselves or too shocking to say out loud. Not many people could say with their words: “Hey, back off of my turf, I want to keep and grow my power.” But they may say it with their actions or double signals. We are not often conscious of wanting to maintain and/or increase our status in the moment of conflict; and if we are conscious, not many of us are skillful enough to go to the root of the authentic message and communicate it in a manner which will not incite an attack. So it is easier to just give off a double signal and get into trouble. And when we give them off we do not see our double signals; but others see them and react to them.

Watching double signals, especially when we are facilitating, can help us notice the rank we do have and also the rank of others. “Facilitators must be quick to read double signals if they are to forestall violent confrontation” (Mindell, 1995, p. 57). Of course, when the double signals come from the facilitator the situation is much more complicated. It is very difficult for the facilitator—or anyone—to see their double signals. But we get glimpses of our double signals in the responses of others. If others are angry at us it is likely we are unconsciously sending double signals that are not congruent with the rest of our message. (Jan Dworkin, personal communication, January 28th, 2009). We can do inner work and learn more about these irritating signals. Inner work is simply a way to begin to work with the conflict inside of ourselves alone or working with a coach/therapist.

The following is a partial list of signals that indicate high or low rank.

Signals of High Rank

- interrupting others
- ignoring the requests of others

- feeling energized, important and/or confident-
- others looking for your input
- others wanting access to you and are willing to wait for you

Signals of Low Rank

- feeling uncomfortable or afraid
- getting interrupted
- others not waiting for you—you wait for them
- not being able to ignore the requests of others
- lacking confidence and not feeling important.

Rank Can Be Like a Numbing Drug

One of the essential troubles with rank is the oxymoronic characteristic it tends to have: the more rank you have the less aware you tend to be of the impact of it on others. When we get some rank we feel elated, powerful and/or altered in our consciousness. It is like a drug (Mindell, 1995, p. 49). Rank can numb us so that our ability to feel is limited. When we do not feel much we are likely to ignore our own emotions and the feelings of others. This numbness is a potential threat to our capacity to feel, to other people around us and to the bottom line interests of the organization in which we find ourselves in this somewhat altered state.

Schuitevoerder deepens our understanding of this simile of rank as a drug which “dulls the senses” and notes the challenge of recognizing it:

When we use it poorly, we suffer, our relationships with others suffer and we create an unhappy world around us. Recognizing that we have rank might sound simple, but it is a challenging process.We might not even recognize that rank exists when we feel comfortable and at ease in a situation. Being in the comfort of rank dulls the senses and relaxes our awareness so that we begin to unconsciously use and at times abuse this rank. (Schuitevoerder, 2000, pp. 111-113)

Rank Can Be Like a Healing Drug

While rank can dull our senses and numb us, allowing us to wreak havoc on ourselves and others, rank can also be used with awareness and become a source of healing. “Rank is not inherently bad, and abuse of rank is not inevitable. When you are aware of your rank you can use it to your own benefit and the benefit of others as well” (Mindell, 1995, p. 53).

Rank awareness, well used in a challenging moment of conflict, can be like a life saving dose of epinephrine given to a child having a lethal asthma attack. It creates space for others to breathe and to interact in more respectful ways. An example is the way a co-worker used his rank positively during a sales meeting in October 2008. At one point he noticed that I was acknowledging my part in the conflict and that others were not. I was feeling angry yet I was not able to articulate my emotions. He challenged me and the others to take responsibility for their part in the conflict. He pointed out specific instances when others were not using their rank well and asked for a response. This was relieving to me and freed up the atmosphere for others.

Overestimating or Underestimating Rank

There may be a temptation to underestimate or overestimate one’s rank, especially in the midst of conflict. As Joe Goodbread stated in class one day: “Everyone looks more powerful than they feel in a conflict” (Joe Goodbread, MACF Fall Residency 2007, used with permission). Maybe we are like some of the male animals, who puff themselves up when in a fight in order to intimidate the other. And whether it is at work, on the playground or on the world stage, we can see the need to accurately estimate and represent our power. The danger of overestimating or underestimating our power is immense. “It’s clear that underestimating our opponent’s power is dangerous. That is how wars are lost. But underestimating our own power is how wars are started, and it is responsible for everything from bullying to global escalation of international conflict”

(Goodbread, 2007, p. 30). This notion of how we underestimate power or rank is incredibly insightful. We start and lose wars, in part, because we underestimate power in the other and in ourselves. In the same way we exacerbate workplace conflict.

One way to estimate rank more accurately is to ask those with less power what they see in us or others as they frequently have a better pulse on the situation than those with more rank.

Frequently those who are in less powerful positions know more about who has rank and the effects of rank and power than those who wield this rank. Those who have less rank need to stay awake and balance out the effects of this rank and the unconscious use of it with awareness of how to survive and manage in cultures and situations which bestows less rank on them. Those who have more rank need to recognize this rank and listen to those who are subject to it in order to learn how to use this rank well. Recognizing rank can occur from feedback from others, inner work on ourselves and exploring the feelings we have in positions of lesser rank. (Schuitevoerder, 2000, p. 113)

Summary

Rank is complex and often overlooked component of conflict. When we have social, psychological, spiritual, or contextual rank it can make us feel like we are on a drug. This experience, wonderful as it feels, can dull our senses and make us less aware of others and our own power. This frequently leads to conflict. Misuse of rank and underestimating rank can cause big problems whether we are at work, at home or part of the world stage. Rank can also be a healing drug when used with awareness and compassion. Knowing where we have rank and where others have rank, by studying the signals being given, can permit us to be more alert to power and how it is being used. When we use our rank skillfully—which may mean embracing it and using it strongly—conflict can be averted, minimized or worked with productively. When rank is skillfully used relationships are more harmonious and the larger organization functions better.

Chapter 5: The Village Shakes Me Awake: Five Case Studies

A wise teacher of mine, Rev. Frank Quinlavin, CSC, once said “All stories are true, some of them even happened.” These stories you are about to read are true *and* they happened. In these stories I will begin to integrate the previous three chapters by recording what happened and analyzing the interplay of rank and conflict. Before I get to the cases I wish to make some general comments about my rank at work and some specific notes about how we treat conflict within that culture.

My Rank at Work

As a Caucasian, middle-to-upper middle class man I have high social rank. I also have psychological rank formed in me from some of my life experiences as a former Roman Catholic priest, a student of Process Work and the second eldest of five children in a family that lived with fairly intense levels of conflict. And, lastly, I have high contextual rank because of three roles I occupy: as a salesman, as the facilitator of our company meetings and as the brother of the owner. And I am a salesman with 6 years of experience. As a general rule, those in sales positions have more contextual rank than those who work in the other parts of a company. This is mostly due to the fact that they are generally paid more and often viewed by some as more valuable to the business. I also facilitate almost all of our company meetings, which also boosts my contextual rank because facilitators tend to have high rank. And finally as I mentioned earlier, I am also the brother of the boss. This may be the most significant part of my contextual rank. Because of this relationship I am not afraid to ask for his time or have substantial conversations about the business with him. I have not been afraid to ask for special privileges. And it also makes my job as a salesman easier. Who knows how many sales I have made that might have not been closed if my last name were Smith? Perhaps the greatest privilege I have received, which others probably

would have not gotten, is the ability to take significant time away from work for my MACF degree. I have taken 4-5 weeks away per year for residencies and an additional full day or half day off per week for almost a year and a half. This is extremely significant and as grateful as I am for the time, it was the source of much angst for all parties, including me.

I also enjoy rank as the elder brother of the boss. Being the older brother also confers a certain subtle degree of status in itself though I am not sure how to measure it. I do believe that it has been useful for our relationship. If I were the younger brother it could be more challenging to work for my brother Donald (as I mentioned, this is not his real name.) It balances out our respective ranks somewhat. So I have high rank in at least three of the four types of rank. However, as we will see, all this rank is not necessarily a gift.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, rank can make a person less aware and therefore more likely to use their power in unhelpful or even destructive ways. This is a sobering truth to a person with as much rank as I have at work. Indeed I have been caught unaware of my rank and using it poorly. This experience has been both painful and educational for me.

Conflict and My Work Culture

Conflict, when it is not worked with productively causes people to get hurt and to become angry. Occasionally, as everyone who reads the paper knows, verbal conflict turns into physical violence. At times at my work, we have had conflicts which were so intense that they almost spilled over into a physical fight. Twice in the space of a year strong words were spoken that alluded to that dangerous potential. Two different people actually said these words: “I was so angry at you that I was preparing to lose my job by coming after you.” And “There is going to be a fist fight around here, if we don’t deal with some things.” These sorts of strong words, in the age of so much workplace violence, should be taken seriously. And I am grateful to say that at my

workplace we have taken them seriously and there have been no physical altercations at our company in the 7 and a half years I have been there. Though there have been no physical fights we have not been immune to internal battles or personal injury. There have surely been moments when people have inadvertently hurt each other emotionally. And these emotional injuries are also destructive to co-worker relationships and can even diminish the company's purpose. As we shall see from Daniel Goleman's book *Social Intelligence*, in Case #1, the emotional injuries sometimes also have a physical component.

Whether the conflict is emotional or physical it is a huge challenge to be conscious of our rank at that moment. When we are in the middle of a heated interpersonal battle, when tempers are flaring and voices rising, few if any of us are truly aware of or careful with our rank. Thoughts that demonstrate consciousness of rank, like these which follow generally have not crossed my mind even in lower intensity situations: "I am the brother of the boss, I better be careful here" or "I am the #2 salesman and he is the guy who delivers blades, I need to be aware of my privilege" or "I may have more psychological rank right now than he does, I need to tread gently now."

At my best, in the cases which follow, I have been aware that the situation is escalating and I have attempted to do something useful to work with the escalation; at my worst, I am simply defending myself accusing the other and making things worse. I am not yet sufficiently trained or healed enough to have awareness of my rank at all times during such emotionally charged moments. It is my hope that through experience and learning, I will notice the influences of rank sooner and deal with them more effectively.

As we have discussed above, there are ways to grow our rank awareness by assessing our rank status and paying attention to signals that indicate rank. There are two other bits advice I received from one of my teachers, Jan Dworkin, which I would like to share here as we begin to

wrap up this section on rank. 1. She recommended that I “Catch the conflict before it escalates.” This is a really strong and positive use of rank. This is violence prevention. It happens through paying attention to the emotional energy present in the field and to the words spoken by the other. If they are repeating things to us, or coming back to a conversation we had three hours earlier still upset it should send up a bright red flag of awareness. 2. Jan also said that if I do not catch the conflict as it escalates, when another person has already gotten angry with me, it is a sign that I may be misusing my rank. I can silently ask myself as they are expressing their unhappiness: “How could I be misusing my rank with them?” If possible I can do some inner work on the spot, even asking them for a moment to collect myself so that I can listen better and accept responsibility in a way that deescalates the situation (Jan Dworkin, personal communication, January 27, 2009).

Why Does Rank Tend to Make Us Less Aware of Others?

When we have rank we feel special, privileged, and powerful. In the short term rank makes our work easier and boosts our sense of self-importance. In the long term, if we are not highly conscious of our rank, the sweetness of those good feelings can spoil into the rotten fruit of unhappy relationships. And often we are not very aware that we are enjoying the benefits of it. Often we are, as Mindell has theorized, “drugged” with it.

As a salesperson, when I am selling well life is fun and I feel a boost of energy. It is like I am on some drug. And I want people to notice me. In the month of December 2008 I was fortunate to have hit very good sales numbers. It felt good, especially after having had a personal subpar 2008. I noticed I was laughing more, singing more and joking more with others. My behavior was saying, “Look at me: I’m the #1 salesman now!” In one moment I caught myself being too boisterous, so I toned myself down just a bit. The two salesmen who had the best total

numbers in 2008 had a pretty low December in terms of sales. I noticed that they kept a lower profile visually and verbally; they were not the top dogs and they knew it. One salesman was leading all the rest of the salesmen most of the month one time. His rank rose and so did the volume of his behavior. He also was more confident and more playful. He even put some music on the company intercom, for all to hear. As if to say, “Look at me everyone, I am having a grand month and it is fun. Join my fun!”

Why do we act this way? Because we enjoy the feeling of power and much like an addiction we want more of it.

As I have said, rank is a drug that makes us feel good. We forget we are on it. Like heroin, we need more and more of it to feel well. We steal from the well-being of others and the environment to support our habit. Finally the others can't take it anymore and they revolt. (Mindell, 1995, p. 53)

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the types of conflicts I will be studying in these cases are two-party and group related. Concerning the group conflicts there is some background the reader needs to be aware of: my boss and my co-workers never formally gave me the permission to facilitate differences and go deeper into interpersonal disturbances. I was hoping that they would be open to this, but it was not the path we took. So the work I was able to do as facilitator was somewhat limited. Nevertheless I will call what occurred during the meetings “group conflict” because the conflict became evident while we were meeting as a group.

The outcomes of most of my attempts to work with conflict, whether as a formal facilitator with a group or informally with one other person, are not what I would consider highly successful. However, I am forever changed by my conscious engagement with these encounters and the people with whom I was interacting.

Case #1: Searching for What's Secondary: Hey, Find the Parts Yourself!

Every encounter has both primary and secondary aspects. What is primary is what is known, expressed and acted upon. What is secondary is less known and less fully expressed. Resolutions to conflict frequently lie semi hidden in the world of the secondary, and sometimes rank can keep us from exploring this less known world.

This two-party conflict begins with a conversation in the warehouse where my high rank helped me ignore a simple request and caused trouble for us both later on. My secondary process was disturbed into eventual awareness by the feedback of my co-worker. This case is also an example of how both sides need to go deeper into what is secondary to arrive at a more agreeable solution.

Background. One day I noticed that one of my co-workers was unhappy about something I had done. My first instinct was to ignore him, because it seemed to me that he was just in a mood. However after some reflection and considerable help from one of my teachers, I became aware of how I was misusing my rank with him. It was my behavior, more than his mood, which was making it easy for him to be upset.

The interaction centered on finding small and inexpensive items in the warehouse which to me is a tedious and time consuming task. And since these items represent a relatively small part of my sales finding them is not a priority for me. The way I usually locate these small items is by asking for help from one of the guys in our warehouse who knows better than I do where the parts are kept. I do this even though they have asked me, and all of us in sales, to find them ourselves. Asking those who know the warehouse, I tell myself, is the most efficient means for locating a small part. I am not sure the guys in the warehouse feel the same.

Case. A customer called me about replacing a tiny plastic part on one of his tools. I ask one of the guys in the warehouse, “Hey, can you help me find this part?” He helped me find it, and then said, “Hey, why don’t you find the parts yourself?” I told him I am not good at looking for things and it is easier to just ask him. He did not seem pleased with my reply. My co-worker then brought me into his office so he could show me how to identify and locate certain parts. My eyes glazed over and my attention waned. I just wanted to get back to selling. He seemed irritated with me. I could tell by his body language and his tone of voice.

About 4 hours later this co-worker spoke to me in a gruff tone, “You don’t care about finding your own parts no one does.” “No” I unintentionally lied, “I do care. I want us to work together efficiently.” He said, “I don’t believe it.” I said, “You are entitled to your beliefs.” He was moving around quickly as he spoke to me and in his tone of voice I could hear his anger.

As I walked away I felt surprised and reflective. I asked myself silently: “Wow, why is he so upset? And, do I really care about what he wants me to do?” The answers I gave myself sounded like this: “He is wrong: I do care about finding parts using his method, I just do not have the time to learn it yet. And, he is upset just because he gets moody and angry a lot.” But the interaction bothered me and I wanted to learn more about what was going on between us.

Analysis. Like all of us at my place of work, the guy who knows where the saw parts are has plenty to do. On the surface of this encounter it is obvious that he wants the salesmen to find their own parts. On a deeper level he may want something else: to be recognized and respected. Perhaps he desires to be recognized for the unique skills he has and contributions he has made. And at this point in time I was not giving him any of what he wanted. I too was under a lot of pressure. My time is also valuable. And I also want to be recognized and respected.

As these roles are analyzed here I will sometimes refer to the names of the roles and sometimes to the two persons involved. This is because we are simultaneously in a certain role and persons who are larger than a role. I wish to demonstrate both of those aspects through the writing style.

In this interaction we have at least two roles operating. For the purpose of clarity we can call these two roles The Boundary Maker and the The Boundary Breaker. The Boundary Maker is the role that wants the salespeople to find the parts themselves. This one has set a boundary around their time by asking the salesmen to find their own parts whenever possible. They are saying, in effect: "Respect our systems and do as much as you can to support us." The Boundary Breaker (me) is the role that ignores the Boundary Maker's requests and does things his own way. He has more important things to do. The Boundary Breaker does not want to learn to find tiny parts for several reasons: it is a hassle to locate them; it calls on skills of memory and detail; and it is easier to just someone who knows better. The Boundary Breaker says, "Hey when you quickly help me to find a part I can spend more time selling more of the higher value products. I also want to be valued and respected for my contributions."

The Boundary Maker role says, "You don't care about finding your own parts, no one does." He sounded hopeless and frustrated. He might have wanted to say: "Hey, why are you taking advantage of me? You are not more important than me; my time is as valuable as yours. Find your own parts." Or he could have said, "Hey, I too care about efficiency, which is why I made the schematics for you. You just have to use them." Perhaps he was at an edge to go that far with someone like me who has very high rank in almost every category. When others, especially those with high rank, do not listen to a person's legitimate requests that person may become understandably upset. He had tried everything he could think of to get the salesmen to find their

own parts, and now was angry that still no one had followed or cared about his plan. Perhaps he felt that no one cared about him.

Why should my co-worker bear the short end of the stick every time I, or any of the salesmen, need a part? His job, a wise elder might say, is no more or less important than anyone's. He wants us to find the parts ourselves; he wants more time to do his other jobs in the warehouse. He bears the short end of the stick partly because of my use of rank.

The Boundary Breaker, who has higher contextual rank, overlooks the request to "find the parts yourself" and when challenged denies the truth about caring. When The Boundary Maker makes an accusation, "You don't care about finding your own parts," The Boundary Breaker said, "I do care. I want us to work together efficiently." I was thinking but did not say, "Hey, it is easier and more efficient for me to simply ask you where to find a part. It usually takes you 5 to 10 seconds to direct me to it. It might take me 10 to 20 minutes. Therefore it is better for the company if you find the parts."

The Boundary Breaker has more contextual rank than The Boundary Maker in this situation. All of the salesmen have more contextual rank than the guys in the warehouse. And therefore it is relatively easy for the salesmen to ignore the requests of those in the warehouse. As we saw in Chapter 4, those with high rank can more easily ignore the requests of those with lower rank.

It might be better for The Boundary Breaker to say something like this:

We are all important here and time is precious for all of us. I am willing to learn and use the tools to find parts. I want to respect your time and recognize your contributions. (Then pause to watch for feedback and then proceed.) And I also want you to see who I am and notice my side of this story. I also want to be respected and recognized by you. There may be times when I do not have 10 minutes to use find a part and will just need to ask for your help. Or maybe I will try to read them and fail. If you have a few moments to help me at that time it will be useful to me and the customer. How does that sound?

For this to be a genuine request The Boundary Breaker needs to be willing to accept a “no” to this question. But if it is done skillfully, with sensitivity and awareness, an affirmative response is likely.

The Boundary Maker also bears the short end of the stick in this situation because “caring” is primary for me and I was unable to access what is secondary: admitting I did not really care. So when he asked if I cared I said “yes” even though I did not. This was a double signal and got under his skin. Saying something like this would have been difficult for me: “You are right I do not care about what you want. I am not listening to or respecting what you are asking for and that is not right. I will change that.” Admitting that I do not care represents a bridge I could not cross by myself. I needed outside support to admit it and cross it. Once I admitted it and “picked up” his accusation that I did “not care” and that I was going to change that things calmed down between us.

Later that day I spoke with Jan Dworkin about the encounter. She helped me to see that this was a real misuse of rank on my part (Jan Dworkin, personal communication, January 28th, 2009). I recall feeling some resistance in me as she spoke. Her strength, clarity and metaskills helped me move through the resistance. But even after the call I could feel that I was losing my ability to do exactly what I wanted. Instead I would now have to do the unpleasant work of finding the parts myself. I asked Jan how I could have better used my rank.

Jan had asked me the following questions: Is it really more efficient to ask Karl about parts? Who knows what asking him does to his feeling state and his capacity to work at an optimal level? Perhaps it causes him to fume and even make mistakes. He was still angry 4 hours later. Perhaps he feels belittled and less important because his request has been ignored multiple times. Beyond the evident emotional turmoil I catalyzed, could my behavior also be affecting his

health? Did my use of rank impact his intent to remain working at the company? Who knows? These were powerful and sobering questions. I felt like the drunk whose spouse was reporting the destruction he had done the night before and asking “Are you aware of how you affect us when you act like that?” No, I was not aware. The call finished and I felt a mixture of emotions: sad about how I had behaved, irritated about the prospect of having to change, and excited to get a fuller picture of the way I was using my rank at work.

Next day: A better use of rank. As a result of that call I had a conversation with Karl the next day. My side of it went something like this: “Karl, I’ve been thinking about it and you were right. I did not want to use the schematics you have prepared for us. The reason is that it is much easier for me to just ask you where a part is located. But that isn’t right; you are also busy and would rather not go searching for parts when every one of us now can find them ourselves with a little research. Thanks for the reminder and for showing me how to look up the locations. The next time I get a request for a part you can count on me to use the schematics first and come to you only if I have a problem finding something, OK?” He was wearing a very big smile when I left him. A few days later my brother told me, “The buzz around here is how much you have been changing.” It was refreshing to hear some positive feedback about me because there had been plenty of gossip on the negative side for a long time. Since that day my relationship with this co-worker has improved.

Conclusions. This case demonstrates the challenge of using rank well and going deeper into a conflict which looks so simple on the surface. Though I was able to pick up his accusation and admit that I did not care while showing a willingness to change, there was more to do. I was not able to give him the deeper recognition he surely wanted, nor was I able to fully represent my needs. I also want to be able to rely on his parts-expertise sometimes. Since that day I have found

myself recognizing him at company meetings, more than anyone else, and this seems to help us get along better. The concluding section, *Goleman and Physiological Effects of Conflict and Stress*, contains more about what can happen to the body when people are not listened to and respected by those with higher social or contextual rank.

Case #2: You are Not Doing Your Job: The Danger of Double Signals

This case shows the trouble which can be caused in a group by double signals and unknown secondary processes. Double signals, as we have seen in Chapter 4 are those signals being sent without awareness. They do not match a part of or the whole message being sent. Secondary processes are similar to double signals. They are those processes which are less known to us or to a group. They are beyond the edge of our comfort or our ordinary awareness. These less known processes are often indicated by double signals.

Rank tends to keep us comfortably planted in our primary process or primary identity. Rank can “dull our senses” so that we do not easily see the impact of our behavior. Others seem responsible for the conflict happening in the field, not us. We are shocked that they are reacting so strongly and behaving so badly. In the cozy world of our high rank there is no need to cross over edges and explore what is secondary. When we are enjoying power and special privileges from the perspective of our primary identity why should we change? “We steal from the well-being of others and the environment to support our habit. Finally the others can’t take it anymore and they revolt” (Mindell, 1995, p. 53). All of a sudden a dramatic scene spills out onto the meeting floor and we are left with a lot of mopping up to do. While we are mopping we have the chance to find out what is secondary and what double signals got us into mess we created.

Background. In the first part of 2007, Donald, the owner of the company, added three salesmen and divided up the “pie” of our customer base into six pieces instead of three. This was

a big change, and though done carefully over time, still caused some animosity among the sales force. Some of the senior salesmen lost accounts they wanted to keep and other newer salesmen felt they did not get the more lucrative accounts they deserved. By the end of the year there was still some jealousy and general irritation about which person ended up with which accounts. Also, to make things worse, the economic slowdown affected our company sales numbers. It looked like very little quarterly or annual bonus money would be given out at the end of the year. Tension began to mount, lowering teamwork among the salesmen.

A salesman with low contextual rank asked me to call a meeting to talk things over. I spoke with Donald about convening a meeting and he agreed it was a good time to attempt to work through some of our challenges. So I called a meeting. One of the issues to be covered was the possibility of giving up, sharing, or trading accounts. This was related to the jealousy and general irritation left over from the dividing up of the “customer pie.”

Case. I was facilitating the sales meeting and I noticed that the air was thick with apprehension; I could feel it in my stomach. People were not saying much to each other as they sat down. At the beginning of the meeting I said something like this: “I want to say that even though it has been a slower year and a sub-par month, I think we need to keep working together as a team. One of the ways we can improve is by communicating better and asking each other for help. Perhaps we can do a little of that here.” There was an awkward silence after this statement.

About half way into the meeting I attempted to offer my help to Kevin with two of his accounts. He quickly said no to both requests, almost interrupting my offer. I felt rejected by him but still wanted to help others with their accounts. So I turned to Ed, the salesman who at the time had the strong numbers, and asked him if I could help call on any of his accounts. He retorted in an irritated tone of voice: “Like which ones?” I named a customer and said, “I’m not sure how

much business they did with us this year, but they are on the path I travel and I know you do not get a chance to travel there much. I can stop by for you and perhaps help you out.”

He took my request as an attack and defended himself vigorously, saying in a loud, sharp voice: “I am feeling defensive! Are you telling me I am not doing my job?!!” I told him, also feeling defensive, and “No, I am not saying you are not doing your job! You are doing a hell of a job! You are one of the top salesmen around here. I am saying that I can help you with this account and that we all can work together more, in the interest of raising our profits and hitting bonus.”

Donald broke in before it escalated any further and said in an authoritative tone: “Hold on guys. Let me put it this way Ed: You are not doing your job. Your job is to sell blades and no, you are not doing that with this particular account. Tom may have a good idea here. Especially if that account needs in-field service and you are not getting there.”

I was shocked at Donald’s directness. The group also seemed surprised and fell silent. Ed, clearly uneasy, and with a forced smile said, “Well, I can take that from you, but not from him.... I’ll think about it.” The intervention abruptly ended our encounter. I felt smug and pleased that Donald had been so strongly on my side, but I tried to not rub it in or call attention to it, because Ed was now looking quite vulnerable.

Analysis. My contextual rank was high in December 2007 partly because I was exceeding my sales goals. In addition I was facilitating the meeting. I had not considered, even for a moment, how my rank status would affect my request to “help out” with the accounts of my co-workers. I wish that I had. I was also unaware that I was giving off big double signals in offering to help but really wanting personal gain.

One facet of my primary identity is to be the one who helps and gives to others—to put their needs before mine. It is secondary aspect for me to put my needs first in a way that is fully congruent and conscious. Another secondary process I have—to defend what I feel should be mine—was also beyond my awareness. It was an edge I was unable to cross, though a hidden part of me apparently did cross it because others saw it. I truly thought I was altruistically offering to help Kevin and Ed. They did not believe it for a moment. Because of these secondary processes, which were unseen by me, my message was ripe with double signals. I was communicating through tone of voice, posture and my feeling state something different from my words. The words said “I want to help out.” The rest of me said “I am angry and jealous and I intend to take some accounts from you to boost my numbers.”

There was a chasm between my primary (helping/giving) and secondary (taking/defending) parts. In a way my double signals were attempting to bridge the chasm and carry me over the edge. But they did so with without my permission or awareness. That is what double signals do. They never ask permission and they rarely are accompanied by awareness. Thus I was unable to cross the chasm and to navigate that edge. Things got messy quickly.

When Ed aggressively asked if I was telling him that he was not doing his job, he was sniffing something true: I was indeed accusing him, very obliquely, of not doing his job—of not selling supplies to his customer. Because my accusation was not done directly it was even more irritating to Ed. When an accusation is made indirectly it can be infuriating. The person being accused is confused and cannot find a target to strike back at. They feel attacked, but the words do not sound like an attack.

I was shocked by Ed’s aggressive response. It caused me to think, “Wow, why are you reacting so strongly, I just want to help you out here.” I was trying so hard to not step on toes or

cause reactions. But Ed was able to read my double signals. He saw what I wanted and what I was feeling more clearly than I did. He felt attacked and was understandably irritated with me. That is why both of us were quite upset by the interaction.

I was not aware that I was still irritated at Ed and Kevin (and myself) for something that happened earlier in the year. When Donald asked us, at the beginning of 2007, to come to him privately and request accounts we felt should be ours I minimized both my rank and my own self-interest. Some of the guys were going to him to request big accounts and defend their sales-turf. I told myself “I am above posturing for the best accounts” and “I trust Donald will divide up the accounts fairly and protect my interests for me.” Meanwhile the strong self-interest of a few other salesmen, who maintained some of the best accounts, was disturbing to me. Yet I did nothing about being disturbed. Then as the economy worsened, and my numbers were falling short of my goals, I regretted not going after some of the bigger accounts that I felt I deserved. By December I was jealous of others and unhappy about how the accounts were divided up. I felt that Kevin and Ed, who had big contextual rank, had fought for and gotten more than their fair share. And it was too late. So my feelings came out in my double signals.

Donald, using his superior contextual rank as the boss, made a strong facilitative intervention and reframed my comment very directly to Ed. This de-escalated the scene immediately. It was an effective intervention because it was a direct and congruent accusation and because it came from the boss: there were no double signals which went with it. I do remember feeling that Donald treated Ed a little roughly in his tone of voice. He came down a little hard on him, publicly. However I was not able to say or do anything as the facilitator to support Ed in the moment. I was secretly happy that my brother, the boss, had come to my rescue and I sided with him 100%.

Ed's fascinating final comment shows the importance of rank and the power of the boss. He said, "Well, I can take that from you, but not from him." He might have meant this: "I can take a critique of my work from the boss who signs my paycheck; but I can't take it from a guy lower than me on the totem pole of rank, who is not my boss." Or possibly, "I can take criticism when it is direct and clear, but not when it is hidden and the critic is pretending to be generous."

Conclusions. There were some real "hot spots" at this meeting. Even though it was quite intense emotionally, and despite my poor use of rank awareness, we did attempt to work openly with our differences. By the end of the meeting the feeling in the atmosphere was remarkably different. There was laughter and a general increase in energy. It was as if a rain had cleared the air. Ed also did something surprising and unusual. He gave me the account in Wisconsin we had been talking about, without requesting anything in return. So even though I unskillfully used my rank awareness things still worked out well for us. Perhaps our attempts to work together, coupled with Donald's strong intervention, were enough to change the spirit among us and create a positive outcome. Still there were lingering feelings of awkwardness in the atmosphere and for some time things were tense between Ed and me.

Though the spirit did shift somewhat among us after that December 2007 meeting, I know that I could have done things differently. If I could do it over, the first thing I would do is realize my rank going into the meeting. This might create enough sensitivity in itself for things to be less volatile. The second thing I would do is cross my edge and discover my secondary self: the part that wants their accounts and can openly ask for them. Doing that would allow me to make the requests in a more congruent way, and perhaps offer something in return. The double signals would be missing and there would be less conflict. Doing these two things would result in a

clearer and possibly more detached message. Instead of asking if I could “help out” with the accounts I might have said something like this to Ed:

I know you have had a good year Ed, and you are leading us in sales. And I know that all of us have accounts which, for lots of reasons, we have not worked much this year. You may have some ideas about some of mine. One account I think we can get more business from, which is yours, is deep into my territory. It is an account which warrants in-field visits. You haven't been able to get there this year and I have. I think with a little background from you on their history I can grow the business with them, partly by stopping by a few times a year. I'm wondering if you would be open to trading that account for a similar-sized one of mine.

If I had approached the situation directly, without double signals, I do not think he would have snapped at me. He may have asked to think about it, but the environment would have felt much different.

We also could have found a way to work more deliberately with the missing role of the tough boss who says, “You are not doing your job; you need to give that account to the other guy.” This would have been more challenging because the group has not given permission to work at a deeper level.

Case #3: The De-Escalating Force of Picking Up an Accusation

This case demonstrates the potential de-escalating impact of “picking up” an accusation, even if done imperfectly. Picking up or receiving an accusation is the art of seeing the truth in another person's criticism and genuinely taking responsibility for it. If someone calls you selfish, the assumption in Process Work is that they are right—you are selfish. The one who made the accusation wants you to admit the truth in what they are saying; your job is to find the truth in the accusation and admit that it is true, at least partially. You may say something like this, “Yes, it is true I can be selfish and I was selfish with you on that day. My behavior was disrespectful to you and caused you trouble and I will change it by becoming more aware and doing things

differently.” This is very different from simply saying “I am sorry.” The way in which you pick up an accusation matters.

The way I picked up the accusation in this case was done in a particular fashion: by matching the energy with which the accusation was being leveled. The results were immediate. It is hard to know which was more influential in this case, the act of matching the energy or the act of taking responsibility for the accusation. It seems likely that both played an important role in addressing the escalating conflict. If the one receiving the accusation responds to the accuser with a similar energy that the accuser used with them it can either quickly de-escalate things, or make things worse. Fortunately, in this case it was the former.

The act of sincerely acknowledging the truth in an accusation and taking responsibility for it is not easy. It is challenging for at least three reasons: (a) the accusation is often made in a unskillful or harsh manner (because by the time they say it out loud they are usually quite upset); (b) the central message, the heart of the accusation, may be outside the awareness of the one being accused, and (c) no one likes to be criticized.

Picking up an accusation, challenging as it is, becomes an essential part of making conflict productive. It is essential because without it the field, the people who are holding different positions, tends to remain polarized. When a field is polarized conflict can easily escalate and get out of control. But if the accusation can be owned, if one party can hear the accusation the other is making of them and genuinely see the truth in it, even a tiny percentage of the truth in it, then things can more easily shift. Conflict and violence can be averted. The frozen water begins to flow again.

A facilitator may be needed to assist each side in doing their job well. The accuser may require help making their message clear and the one being accused may need help seeing where

the comment is true. The accused can pick up the message in a number of different ways. The manner in which they communicate is an important part of the process. Any double signals the accused shows can complicate matters quickly.

Background. One day in 2008 I received an email from a co-worker regarding an agenda contribution for the March meeting. This person, who has lower social and contextual rank than I do, had included a quote which seemed inappropriate to include in the agenda. It was a comment, which was attributed to another worker, about what would happen to those who do not follow some new procedures. The note said whoever did not follow the new procedures would be taken “out back” and beaten by another worker. I questioned this person twice about including the quote. Both times they were adamant that they wanted it included, as is. So I made the decision to include the quote. It will surely to get a reaction, I thought, and bring some things to the surface which will be useful to the company. The quote was meant to be a joke, but it was a joke which no one laughed at: it had a brutally serious side. And it hinted at a missing element in our work place: the role of The Enforcer.

Case. There was a heavy feeling in the air when I walked in to the meeting and I noticed stiffness in some of the body language. I didn't say anything about my observations but noted them internally. There was no seat for me as I had arrived 3 minutes late and no one offered to get one for me. Often we do offer to get someone a chair when there are no more in the room. During the 2 hour meeting we had several very intense exchanges, all of which challenged my capacities as a facilitator. One exchange involved a person who had left the meeting early, then came back into the meeting to yell at another worker who had indirectly accused him of not giving good service to a customer. Another intense moment came during the report that included the inappropriate quote. I was accused of making a mistake by including it. Some implied that the

yelling happened earlier in the meeting was a result of the quote I put on the agenda. I made an unsuccessful, half-hearted attempt to pick up the accusation and admit that it was a mistake. I said something like this: “Yeah, I tried, twice to get the person who wanted it on the agenda to let me omit it, but they were insistent on including it so I did.” I was thinking, “It was also their fault; they were the one who wrote it, why isn’t anyone going after them?” That person was completely silent, as I took the heat. My failure to take responsibility caused the accusations of me to become more aggressive.

Donald accused me indirectly for putting this note on the agenda. He said, “Whoever did this, it was clearly improper and unacceptable.” He, and everyone in the meeting, knows that it is me who prepares the agenda. Others chimed in about how putting that quote in the notes was destructive. I did not want to take responsibility. I was waiting for the person who wanted it in there to speak up, but could not even look at them as the emotional temperature in the room rose quickly. The whole scene seemed to be spiraling out of control and I was feeling unjustly criticized and attacked. I began to feel lightheaded and dizzy. Then I remembered what I learned about one way of de-escalating conflict during an attack. Dawn Menken had told us that at times the facilitator must match the level of intensity and emotion in the room to make an effective intervention (Spring Residency 2007, used with permission).

So I did something a bit risky. I took a moment and decided that no matter whose fault it was that I was wrong to have put it on the agenda. Someone had to take the rap for it and I was the one who typed up the agenda, so why not me. So I very consciously raised my volume, looked everyone in the eye and decided to own it. I said, “OK, so I made a #*\$@ mistake! I printed the quote. It was my fault and my responsibility and it will never happen again. OK?” I was angry at them and also angry at myself that I had made that mistake. They all backed down, the energy

changed dramatically and the meeting went on smoothly once I caught my breath. I was amazed at the way things changed so quickly.

Analysis. This case demonstrates a strong but imperfect use of rank on my part. Though I was slow to take responsibility for the accusation and it was not done perfectly cleanly, I finally owned my part in printing the inappropriate quote. My resistance to accepting the blame caused the accusations to become attacks. I was able to remember the idea that matching the tone of the accusation or attack can help to de-escalate things. Perhaps it was my volume, or the profanity, but I was fortunate in that the situation calmed dramatically and we were able to get the meeting back on track. Is it possible that things de-escalated because they were shocked? Perhaps the shock, taking responsibility and matching the energy was the right recipe for de-escalation in this case. Whatever the combination of forces or the reasons for the de-escalation, it is likely that I found the energy to match the attacks coming at me because of my high rank. If I were a person with low social, psychological, and contextual rank it is unlikely that I would have been able to speak up in a way that silenced my attackers.

Yet there was a double signal in the way I took responsibility for printing the troubling quote: I had an edge of anger in my voice when I spoke up. Part of the reason I was angry was because I had done my best to exclude it. I was angry at the author of it who was not taking any portion of the rap for it. In addition I was unhappy with those who were blaming me for the behavior of the guy who yelled at another during the meeting. In my mind I was saying “Why are you coming after me, I was not the source of this hot conflict. I’m not the reason that guy yelled at the other guy. I’m just the messenger. Do not shoot the messenger.”

But the truth was that I had not excluded it, so I was also angry at myself for not being able to say “no” to the one who insisted it go into the agenda. Saying “no” is a secondary process,

and less known process, for me, I really enjoy saying “yes.” Someone in my life taught me that saying “no” is less desirable than saying “yes.” So the first thing would have been to find the capacity to operate from that less known style of mine and simply say “no, I cannot print that, it will cause a fight.” That would have been the most efficient solution to this brewing conflict.

I was angry, though not consciously; about the reason the quote happened in the first place: the absence of a Consistent Rule Enforcer role in our work place. Donald, the boss, is highly gifted in many ways. Though he has come down hard occasionally on someone who did not follow proper procedure, he tends to be generous and understanding of those who struggle to follow the rules. He is also a really nice and well-liked leader. This generosity and understanding attitude can sometimes look like a lack of enforcement. Those who track our paperwork and are responsible for accounting may feel the pain of this generous and understanding attitude more than others. They feel it so strongly that they insisted that I keep the tough quote about threatening those who do not follow the rules with a beating, even though everyone knows the threats are were not meant to be real.

Conclusions. What else could I have done to create a different interaction at this meeting related to the issue of rules? I could have become curious about why the person was so insistent on including the offensive quote. They were clearly feeling desperate to get others to follow rules. They were doing something dramatic to get our attention. I also could have shared the quote with Donald, who surely would have had me remove it. Finally, I could have discovered, through inner work and/or coaching with a teacher, that there was a ghost role behind the polarizing quote. (See Case #5 for more on ghost roles) If I had found out that the role missing was the Consistent Rule Enforcer, the one who insists that rules be followed, the meeting might have taken a different track. If we could have found a way for someone, preferably Donald, to occupy that role it may

have relieved the conflict. But The Enforcer is a tough role to embody and those who find themselves in such a role may not be well-liked by others at work.

Results. There were a number of positive changes I noticed in the days following this meeting. Tim had a deeper awareness for how he was treating others. One day he said to me: “I just blew Sally off, that’s not good.” At lunch time I noticed a very different spirit. People were sharing food, talking animatedly and connecting better. Our sales in the days that followed were good. I had a big sales day the day after this meeting and helped a co-worker with lower contextual rank make an important sale that week. Something had definitely shifted for the better.

Case #4: Misuse of Rank: The Cost of Not Picking Up Accusations

This case is in some ways similar to the previous Case #3, except in this case I never found the truth in the accusation that was made about me being selfish. In not doing that I created plenty of trouble for myself and for the others involved. I contributed to an unproductive office-drama, in large part because of my rank. It was not my proudest moment as a worker, facilitator or a person. But is true and it really happened. It is worth studying.

Background. In August 2008, 8 months into my decision to take time off on Fridays, it became clear that this arrangement was not working well for me or for others. We all were feeling extra pressure as the economic picture continued to worsen, locally and nationally. The increased stress of not having enough hours at work to meet my work and my study goals was making me feel like every second was precious and not to be wasted. During that time, we were developing a new process for shredding confidential papers. We were asked to put sensitive materials for shredding into a big blue bin with a tiny slot for an opening. Then a shredding company would come to unlock and dump the blue bins. I took my big box of papers to the bin and realized that because of the small slot, it would take more time than I thought it would. So I planned to do it in

a more efficient way for me, since my time felt so constrained. I planned to wait until the company came to shred our papers and simply hand them my box of papers.

Case. A few days after deciding not to put my papers in the tiny slot in the blue bin I saw the worker from the shredding company in the warehouse picking up our two blue bins. As she was leaving the building I asked her, “Hey, can you wait a moment while I got my box of paper?” She looked at me with an expression that said “Are you serious?” and said nothing. At that moment I had a flirt which lasted a nanosecond, “Do not pressure her to stay.” Almost the same moment I thought, “I have got to get my paper shred and it will just take a moment. This is no big deal.” Just then Larry said something to me about not making her wait. I ignored him as I watched for her answer. To me, the issue was simple and urgent: I had papers which needed to be shredded and she was there to shred them. So I spoke again, interrupting Larry in an urgent voice which could be heard across the whole warehouse, “Can you wait until I get my box of paper, it will take only 20 seconds?” The shredding company representative gave a reluctant affirmative response. I ignored her double signal, and ran to get my box. She had to wait about 20 seconds. I did not give the encounter another thought, or say anything to Larry. Though in the back of my consciousness I knew there was something askew about the interaction.

A few days after the shredding scene in the warehouse Sally walked into my cubicle and said to me, “Tom Esch is selfish.” I reacted angrily, “What?” She calmly said, “That’s what I heard. They say you made the shredding lady wait.” I had a real strong inner reaction and in a sharp tone of voice asked: “Who said that!?” She would not give any names. “Larry?” I guessed. “Karl?” She would not say. I said, “I want to speak with them! That is bullshit!!” She said nothing. I felt anger growing inside. “Please tell whoever it is to come and see me, will you?” She was not willing.

Then I said to her, while trying to calm myself down, “I am selfish, yes. But I’m probably not the only one around here who is. I don’t think I have a monopoly on that one.” II was thinking “Ed is a lot more selfish than me.” Then I continued, “That comment is also about rank.” “What is rank?” she asked. I explained briefly that it is like a pecking order related to power. I went on and told her some reasons why that comment about me was also about rank. I said, “I have high social rank around here as the brother of the boss and have been treated as special in some ways, in particular by being able to take a half day off on Friday to work on my degree. This has made others get mad at me and think of me as selfish.” She agreed to this half-heartedly, “Yeah, I supposed that is sort of true...” and then said, “No, but in this case it is not about rank, you are just selfish.” That direct comment made me even angrier. I cannot remember what happened at that point, I think she left my cubicle and the conversation ended quickly.

Analysis part 1: In the warehouse. This is a case where my high social and contextual rank made it easy for me to interrupt Larry and ignore the woman who came to shred our papers. Interrupting and ignoring others could be referred to as “rolling over” or “steamrolling.”

I rolled over the woman who attempted to say “no” to me when I shouted loudly across the warehouse the second time. There was a tiny flirt, for a nanosecond, that I should just let her leave and not pressure her. A flirt is a like a mini-signal, usually just on the edge of awareness. They are very easy to miss. I ignored this flirt. In a way I rolled over myself. This was the beginning of the damage. My need to have my papers quickly shred was so great that I was willing to ignore her feedback. There was no willingness on my part to hear anything but “Yes” from her. My question was like a command: “You will wait 20 seconds for me!”

The shredding company representative did not answer my first question. A silent answer is often but not always a “no.” As a vendor, saying “No, I can’t wait 20 seconds,” would have

been a risky response. So she was at an edge to say “no.” She probably did not want to wait for me, but her job is to shred our paper, so she waited anyway. Though I did not know it, she had already been at our shop longer than she was supposed to be. I learned later that Larry was trying to tell me that. So there was an added element of pressure. She may have worried, “I’ve already been here longer than I should, and how long will I really have to wait for this loud and insistent guy?”

Waiting can be a big deal in any setting, but has particular implications in a business setting. Waiting means time lost, time lost means money lost. In our business we must be as time-efficient as possible. Yet waiting is a reality and it is a huge but relatively unrecognized issue in our work world. And waiting, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is related to rank. Vendors typically will wait more for customers than customers will wait for vendors. In general, because of social rank, women wait more for men. Those with higher contextual and social rank usually wait less than those with lower rank.

I also steamrolled over Larry’s attempt to stop me from getting my way in the warehouse. Larry did say something like, “No, she can’t wait” but I completely dismissed his effort to stop me. Maybe he saw me doing to her what I have done to him and others, getting my way by pressuring her to do something she did not want to. Maybe he was trying to wake me up to the destructive force of my style of rolling over other people. So he fought fire with fire: he tried to match the energy I had but he did not have enough rank to stop me. Matching the energy does not always resolve a situation, often it can make it worse. So I rolled over him and I can honestly say, as mean as it sounds, it felt good as it happened.

It felt good to roll over Larry for a few reasons. He is a strong personality and is not afraid to stand up loudly for his side of things. Though he has relatively low contextual rank he is

even able to publicly criticize others. He has big psychological rank and speaks up assertively, sometimes even aggressively, at meetings. And I have been one of his favorite targets. So, it felt powerful to simply ignore his attempt to stop me. It felt like revenge, to just shout over him and get what I wanted.

This case is full of unconscious use of rank, mostly by me. Though Larry too had used his psychological rank with me, through public criticisms of me during our meetings, I had allowed him do it. When he has criticized and accused me I have not been able to either own it fully or stand up to his strength. So in this moment, with real willfulness, urgency and rank on my side, I broke through his strength and got what I wanted: my papers shred. Needless to say it did not occur to me to go back and check in with Larry or own what I had done. My rank had left me momentarily satisfied and somewhat numb.

On a deeper and seemingly paradoxical level I wanted to feel that Larry and I were on the same team. I wanted him to support me and my need to get my papers shred. But I chose an ineffective way to get that support.

No one likes to be ignored or pressured. It is especially painful to be ignored or pressured when you are the one with less social or contextual rank. This interaction, and other actions of mine, proved the when I do not stand up for myself or take responsibility for accusations made of me it can lead to selfishness and wanting revenge later on. And it caused Larry to gossip about me. The message got formed: Tom Esch is selfish.

In fact not only was I selfish but I was drunk with rank at that moment in the warehouse. I was not aware of the woman's needs or Larry's needs, only my own needs. My misuse of my rank allowed me to run over two people in one moment. And though it was fueled by a desire for

time-efficiency my actions were inefficient because of the fallout they caused and time (and money) it took to mop up the mess.

The reality is that I am selfish and perhaps I need to become even more consciously “selfish.” By this I mean to not put my own needs on the back burner and wait so long to have them met. Rather I need to stand up for myself earlier and more assertively in a situation like this one (Stephen Schuitevoerder, personal communication, 2008-09, used with permission). I could have decided to stand up to Larry or take responsibility for his accusations at earlier meetings. This might have made me less likely to take revenge on him in the warehouse that day. I could have gone to our warehouse manager when I learned of the tiny slot and the lock problem on the blue bins and asked for the key to the lock and I could have quickly emptied my box on the spot. I might have found out when the shredding company was going to be on site and planned to dump my box right when they arrived. But I put my needs on the back burner. I rolled over myself and because of that I rolled over others later on.

Analysis part 2: In the cubicle with Sally. I also tried to roll over Sally’s accusation that I was selfish. This was the one person I could not roll over. Her direct accusation was the alarm clock I finally heard. It felt shrill and brutal, but it was effective. She carries herself with confidence in the company given her modest contextual and social rank. Though as a woman an aspect of her social rank is lower than mine and the other men, she has strong psychological rank and holds her power very well in a group of competitive men.

She used her psychological rank in coming to me with a juicy piece of gossip: “Tom Esch is selfish. That is what I heard.” This is a classic instance of a 3rd party accusation. Sally uses the third party (Larry) to accuse me of being selfish. This use of a 3rd party suggests she may not have had as much psychological rank as it first appeared. This type of accusation usually happens

because the person reporting the gossip does not feel they have the strength (rank) to make the accusation themselves. It is a way of emboldening their side of the case. She began with this 3rd party and then directly gave the feedback, on her own, straight to me. This type of direct feedback does not often happen to me at work, so it was shocking.

Because I was unable to pick up even a fraction of the truth in her accusation we both escalated. I used a technical term (rank) with her and defended myself in effect saying: “I have more power around here and others are jealous.” In doing this I attempted to be in the role of teacher with her. She was not interested in being my student and smartly quipped, “Yeah, I supposed that is sort of true... but in this case it is not about rank, you are just selfish.” Then she left. This blew me away and left me fuming.

My high social and contextual rank allowed me to do a fair job dismissing the truth of Sally’s stinging report. Admitting my selfishness might mean I would have to change and give up some perks. I was not aware at that point of how I had selfishly steamrolled the woman who came to shred our papers, Larry, and now Sally. By this time I was mad. Perhaps Sally was also mad. She might have been irritated that I did not pick up her accusation but instead painted others as sore losers to my big rank.

My comments about rank were intended to deflect away from myself and show how the real issue is the jealousy of others. Ironically my words, and how I said them, convinced her that she was right: Tom Esch is selfish. Maybe she thought, “Tom is in fact getting his way again now by not listening to the feedback he is getting. I better make it even stronger. I’ll say it myself and leave.”

I was not able, in that moment to go over my edge and admit the truth and depth of the comment about my selfishness. She was able to move beyond the third party report to her own

report. Amazingly she finished with her own conclusion: “No, you are just selfish.” But she was not able to go further and say how I have been selfish with her. Perhaps I have made her wait for me. She blurted her personal summary of the gossip and left.

I needed some support from Jan Dworkin to see the truth in the accusation. It took a full session for me to realize that indeed I was quite selfish and bullish in the warehouse (personal communication, August 22, 2008). I rolled over two persons to get my way, all in the name of efficiency. I also resisted some valuable feedback given to me by Sally and in a way also rolled over her. Fortunately I was able with support to eventually pick up a part of the accusation. I was able to wake up a little bit.

Results. Because of my conversations with Sally and Jan Dworkin, and my own personal inner work I was able to learn. I did go back to Larry a few days later and said

I know I didn't treat you right with the situation with the woman who was here to shred our confidential papers. I know you said something, but I didn't even hear it. I was just trying to get my papers shredded and you knew something I did not. It would have been good for me to have listened more to what you were trying to say. I want you to know I am working on that and will have more awareness in the future.

He said, “Yeah, I wanted you to know she needed to leave. And that would be good if you could do that and be more aware.” I felt really good about our little talk. He seemed happy that I shared with him my side of it and he admitted that I had not treated him right.

I also went back in the warehouse one day and worked for about 2 hours, doing receiving of product and some heavy lifting. I actually enjoy such physical work. And I know that the guys in the warehouse loved it. It was an act of reconciliation for me.

Conclusions. This is a case where I misused my rank with at least three persons. I was unable to accept the accusation that I was selfish. My actions contributed to significant disturbance in the entire company. Others contributed, but I am not mainly studying them.

Ironically this case teaches me, once again, that I could actually learn to be more intentionally “selfish.” In doing so I would stay out of this type of trouble. In many ways I do put the needs of others before my own. And then, because I sometimes leave myself with the short stick, when there is an urgent matter I roll over others because I do not have what I need. I might be less likely to ignore others and appear selfish if I found a way to get what I need earlier on. I also learned both by misusing my rank and not standing up for myself when they unintentionally misuse their rank with me, I create an atmosphere for revenge.

If I lived more in this fashion I might have listened to Larry. Had I been more aware and open to him I would have learned that the vendor had already stayed much longer than she was supposed to, because we were having problems with the keys which open the locks on the blue bins. She was solving that problem, which led to the bins being more accessible. Instead of shouting over him I could have stopped, listened and shown respect for his perspective and avoided the whole mess.

When Sally accused me of being selfish I could have picked up the accusation. I could have said: “Yes, you are right, I am selfish. I’m selfish and I steamroll others to get my way. That is not a good way to work and it must be irritating to you and others. I am aware that it causes distractions and it causes pain. I intend to change.” Then I might have waited for feedback and listened to it. Then I might have wondered quietly or aloud: “What is right about being selfish?” There may be a pearl of wisdom in her accusation, if taken deeper could yield a real gem. I also may have then been able to say that I appreciated her message. We might have had a powerful instead of an irritating conversation.

Proprioceptive work related to this case: A matter of the heart. Jan and I later did some deeper work with the case on the same call. She noticed that as I told the story of what happened I

seemed to have no feelings about it. I did not seem sad or angry, just void of feelings. So she asked me if I could feel my body for some clues. I said I felt some blockage in my upper diaphragm. She asked me to make it more intense. I did. It moved up into my heart area. I said it felt like high blood pressure. She asked if I had high blood pressure. I said “No, but my father does.” I said I could feel the pressure in my heart, even some tingling down my left arm and leg. She asked me if I could have a fake heart attack, not a real one. I agreed and began to feel more numbness. Then I moved to the visual channel and saw my heart encased in ice. I remembered a gruesome scene from a movie where they hung a man from a tree, in subzero temperatures and sprayed water on him, from a hose, until he was dead and coated in 2-3” of ice. How horrific!! Then I saw dogs barking and attacking my heart. I saw dogs and pick axes breaking thru the ice.

That experience with Jan was very moving. I realized that I have not had much heart or much feeling at work for some time. I tend to protect my heart by not feeling, by being numb or frozen. In choosing to protect and not feel I become somewhat numb to the emotions of others. This inner posture makes it easier for me to steam roll over others and not notice how they are feeling. It leads to insensitivity and trouble in relationships. I said “Jan, it can be a harsh and mean work environment, I am afraid to have an open heart. I fear I will get hurt. I’m afraid I may have a heart attack if I open it up at work.” She said “No, I think it is just the opposite, if you have a closed heart at work it is more of a health risk. You need to open it up more. Yes, you will be hurt there, but you will also feel and recover from the pain.” This is a life challenge for me: to live with a more open and feeling heart.

There is also a missing role, or a ghost role, present in this case: the one who truly cares, truly feels for others, with an open and generous heart. This is the one who does not roll over their own feelings or the feelings of others, but pays attention and responds with care and sensitivity.

This is a challenging invitation, perhaps with the help of my co-workers giving me the kind of feedback they did in this case, and teachers who can help me interpret the feedback, I can begin to take on this role.

Case #5: The Explosive Power of Ghost Roles

Case #4 illustrates how I did not utilize my rank very well with two co-workers and a vendor. I steamrolled those with less contextual and social rank and did not pick up the accurate accusations they made of me later on. It is a disturbing story which in the end was only partially resolved. But this final one on the explosive power of ghost roles wins the prize. It created a large slice of humble pie for me to eat, but also offered much educational nourishment to me. It was the loudest alarm clock of awareness of the all the cases and it offered me a unique opportunity to wake up. This case highlights the danger of direct confrontation when done with inadequate awareness and the cost of not processing ghost roles.

Ghost roles are just what they sound like: roles that are not embodied by anyone in the room (or the field) created by the people and spirits gathered. Ghost roles are frequently found just beyond personal edges, in double signals and in secondary processes. It is common for groups to not work with ghost roles but rather be haunted by them. Max Schupbach writes about some of the reasons groups avoid working with ghost roles and how taking the path of avoidance creates such turmoil:

One reason that groups often avoid making unintended communication explicit, or giving voice to the ghost roles, is the fear that the consequent conflicts will be irresolvable. This makes sense from a consensus reality perspective, where we are used to not having our conflicts resolved and where relationships can be harmed forever, because someone spoke "the truth." . . . Therefore, processing ghost roles means to realize that you too are like the person, role or group that you thought was responsible for all the difficulties. This is also why if a person who has taken on an unpopular role within an organization leaves, someone else will often pick up the same role or some of its aspects. . . . As a result of these dynamics, it often takes an emotional or charged interaction to understand fully how these roles are present in one's own group.... (Schupbach, 2003, p. 11, 12)

This was my experience, that it took an emotionally charged interaction to bring out the ghosts lingering around the company and occasionally scaring us all.

Background. The economy had been truly faltering by the beginning of the fourth financial quarter of 2008, locally, nationally and globally. Things were looking really grim almost everywhere, especially in construction. Tension at this point in the year was running high and communication was running low. The animosity between various individuals and subgroups appeared to be peaking. We were also missing one salesman at the time. Work was not a fun place to be.

In addition it was becoming obvious to me that several co-workers were jealous of and angry at me for a variety of reasons, one of which was my taking so much time off for my degree. Many things seemed to be coming to a boiling point and the emotional intensity could be felt in the days before the meeting. It was clear that I had to do some internal preparation if I was going to facilitate the upcoming meeting.

The situation the day before our company meeting set the stage. On that Monday we were missing four key workers. Tim, the most recently hired salesman, and I decided to go out of town for deliveries that we felt needed to be made, despite an email from Donald asking us to “try not to travel Monday” because we were going to be short handed. This situation left Kevin and Ed as the only salesmen back at the shop. We both left knowing full well that we were short-handed. As I was loading up Kevin saw me and asked “Where are you going?” I said, “To Wisconsin to make two deliveries.” He looked angry but said nothing. A few moments later in the warehouse I noticed Ed, who did not say one word to me. Neither did I say one word to him for some minutes. Finally I said: “I did not see the email Donald sent until this morning. And I gotta make these deliveries. I’ll be home by lunch time.” Ed said, with gruffness in his voice, “No one sees

anything around here unless it is in their self interest.” “True,” I said, and walked out the door, feeling somewhat troubled by the fact that both of them were clearly angry at me, yet also feeling an inner sense of righteous revenge: this is my turn to serve my customers with in-field delivery. They get the advantage of quick, in-field delivery all the time. The decision to leave, which Tim and I both made, had angered others. It would surely color the Tuesday meeting significantly. I underestimated how big the blow up would be.

I did as much inner and outer preparation as I could for the Tuesday meeting because I knew it would be a hot one. What follows is some of what I did to prepare for the meeting: I spoke with Donald about his intentions for dealing with what happened; I wrote in my journal and meditated about the present situation; I called Monica McCarthy, my classmate, to do some role playing and get feedback; I had a session with my advisor Stephen Schuietevoerder about it; and I did some inner work with an exercise to get me into a larger, more detached internal space. I put more than 4 hours of time into preparing to facilitate a challenging meeting. This is about as much inner work as I have ever done for any one meeting.

Stephen’s advice to me was good. He suggested that I pick up the accusation that I was getting privileges because of my relationship as brother of the boss. My classmate Monica McCarthy suggested, “Why not show your vulnerability? Maybe say something like this: ‘It hurts when I do things for others and get zero recognition. When one person always initiates the hello and the other regularly says nothing it feels like rejection.’” At the end of the call I thought to myself: “We do our jobs in a rough and tumble culture which is not very caring much of the time. Perhaps we need someone with a caring and generous heart here. That is what I want to embody.”

I went to bed that night feeling a little nervous, but mostly calm, grounded and well-prepared. On Tuesday morning I learned that Donald was sick. This news made me nervous. With

Donald absent I feared that the lid might come off the jar of emotions, since he tends to keep things fairly controlled when he is present. My fears came true.

Case. We had a 6:30 a.m. meeting scheduled for Tuesday morning. I was the facilitator and Donald was absent. He was sick, which rarely ever happens and is interesting. I was noticing as much as I could and feeling the climate. The atmosphere felt volatile, like something was about to explode and people seemed to be sitting in teams.

The meeting ran fairly smoothly for about 20 minutes. Then Kevin, a salesman with considerable contextual rank, began to accuse Tim robustly for leaving the shop on Monday. At that time Tim was the second lowest salesman in terms of sales numbers. Kevin said: "I can't believe you left us when we were short handed and the email had been sent telling us to not travel Monday. You were selfish, again, and thinking only of your customers and leaving all the rest high and dry!" He continued accusing Tim and implied that I also had joined in sending a "screw you" message to himself and Ed (and everyone else) by disregarding Donald's email and leaving the shop while we were missing key people. He did not directly speak to me. Tim attempted to defend himself and said, "What do you mean? I had to see my customer. I did not mean to leave you guys here." Kevin did not buy it and things escalated. Kevin pressed him, "If your daughter was sick would you have gone?" Tim shot back, "That is not a fair question." They went back and forth and bit more, interrupting each other and increasing vocal volume. Tim looked at me. I said and did nothing. I was frozen as a facilitator and a person. My brain was racing and I was trying to decide if I would speak and what I would say. The feeling inside was absolute fear, but I could not name the feeling at the time.

Ed, the #1 salesman at the time, joined in with Kevin in what now was a full scale attack of Tim. It looked like a gang of two going after someone with fairly low rank. Ed was clearly angry as he said:

When we are short handed you always leave us. This is not teamwork. How is it that there are two sets of rules around here, one for us and one for others? How is it that we always do what we are supposed to and you just go off and do your own thing and we pick up the slack? If I did that this place would fall apart. I would like to. My customers need support too all the time. But I can't just drop everything and go to them. I need to stock the shelves and do other things so you can all have product. I can't be selfish like you.

At this point my fear was increasing and I was quivering a bit inside. It took several moments to work up the courage to say something, but I could not let Tim be "beaten up" by these two fierce-sounding men any longer. I was confident that as a well-prepared facilitator I could say something which would de-escalate the situation. I recalled the inner work exercise I had done the night before and imagined, just for a split second, that I was the Minnehaha Falls and that the water would run over me and not destroy me. I felt just a hint of the detachment that came with that vision. So I took a breath and I plunged into what was quickly becoming a very hot cooking pot. I said something close to this:

Let me admit that what you are saying, Kevin and Ed, is true for me: I can be self-serving and I was clearly selfish yesterday. I did not see the email from Donald until yesterday morning and I ignored his request to try not travel when we were short handed. Why did I not read Donald's email when I saw it in my "in-box" Friday? Good question, Ed. I was thinking about this last night and realized something I am not proud of: I did not open the email because I was busy and I knew Donald would understand if I did not get to it. Donald is my brother and I knew he will not fire me. I have taken advantage of that relationship and I know it is not right.

I knew that my comments did not go over well when Ed asked me, in a very aggressive tone, nearly interrupting me: "Are you crazy? Is that what you believe? That you can do whatever you want because you are his brother?" As he spoke I felt scared and confused, almost like I partially lost consciousness. At that point I truly have no memory of what happened for a few

moments. I was told later that I repeated my comments again, about doing whatever I want and not being afraid of getting fired. My second attempt was even less skillful and more aggravating. At that point Ed looked directly at me and seemed to be breathing fire. He continued with some comments directed straight at me, using profanity and implying that what I was saying was not true. He also was escalating both in volume and intensity. I wondered, "Does he think I'm lying to him?" He saw my inquisitive look and said something about how screwed up my thinking was and that admitting that I take advantage of my brother is not right. Then he abruptly left the meeting room. He said something else to me as he left but I cannot remember what it was. It was too disturbing to stay fully conscious and in the room at that point. I was thinking about how to respond to him as he was leaving. I said, "I also have things to say to you Ed, I'll tell you later."

Kevin spoke up and continued on that same theme, accusing me and saying how wrong I was, though with a little more calmness. I was working really hard to listen, despite being really shaken up and almost falling apart emotionally. I was breathing and grounding my energy to the best of my ability, but I was clearly off balance. Then I responded to Kevin, feeling some anger myself, "Tim and I also talk about you and try to make sense of what is happening, just like you do of us. We also, I also, have some feelings about what happens around here. I want to say, for myself, that it is painful to not be greeted by people around here. I say 'hi' and they say nothing. That is not pleasant. It is hurtful." Kevin retorted, "You have to earn respect." And I quickly interjected, "Clearly I haven't." He said, "I get up and I don't want to come in to work, I don't enjoy it. A lot of us do not enjoy coming here." A few others joined in the attack of me at that point, but I cannot recall precisely what they said. I know I felt like I had been knocked down and was now being kicked. The meeting ended and I walked away dazed by it. I spent the next several days trying to make sense of it.

Analysis: Preparation and ghosts. I did a lot to prepare for this meeting. Yet there were several things I unintentionally omitted before the Tuesday meeting. I did not talk to Kevin or Ed about what happened Monday and I did not do any inner work related to what took place between us. If I had done either of these things I might have found out why it was so psychologically satisfying to leave them as the only two salesmen in the shop and what the ghost roles were in the background of the drama. These omissions were costly ones, and yet it all seemed somehow part of the natural process of change.

How is it that I could be so prepared for this meeting and yet so unaware? Part of the reason is the power of the unseen ghosts in the background and another part is the intoxicating power of rank. I was drunk with my own high rank and the privileges I had been getting in large measure by virtue of my relationship with Donald. Also, I was not sufficiently aware of how my taking time off had negatively impacted my relationships with co-workers. People had been jealous of and angry at me for a long time and for a variety of reasons. I was not conscious of how my behavior, including things like how I refer to Donald as “my brother” among co-workers was disturbing others. Thus I was not aware that my attempt to pick up Ed’s question about why there are “two sets of rules” would be so inflammatory. I was trying my best to pick up their accusations (that I am selfish, that there are two sets of rules, etc.) but instead sounded like I was defending my behavior and hammering them with double signals related to my own feelings of jealousy, hurt and anger directed at them. In addition I had no idea that my co-workers were ready to revolt. When the meeting ended I was sure that the only problem was that Ed and Kevin had gone on a senseless attack of Tim and me and both had anger issues. It took quite a bit of inner work and external support to begin to see a fuller picture and admit my part in it.

I also was not aware of something very important at the time of the meeting: that Kevin and Ed were not the only ones who were disturbed. I also had feelings about how others had treated me. I felt anger, hurt, and jealousy towards some co-workers. And because of those unprocessed and unconscious feelings my attempt to pick up their accusations may have felt like a hammer to them. I was upset with them for their aggressive tone at the meeting and for other behaviors in the past.

In addition to some painful history between some of us there were other dynamics happening including accusations/attacks that were not picked up, primary and secondary processes, uncrossed edges, double signals and more. But my main interest in this case is to look at the roles and ghost roles and how not bringing them out more overtly exacerbated the situation.

There were at least four important roles and ghost roles floating around the atmosphere: The Selfless One, The Lid Keeper, The Selfish One, and The Nepotist. Of these four the only role which was in the room and consciously occupied was The Selfless One. This role was occupied by Ed and Kevin who had stayed at the shop the day before; but the group did not process that role. We just listened to them talk about how they did the selfless thing while others were selfish. The other roles were partially or fully unoccupied making them ghost roles or semi-conscious ghost roles. A true ghost role is not occupied by anyone in the room, consciously or otherwise. We might say that a ghost role which is occupied unconsciously is a partially-filled ghost role.

The Lid Keeper is the one who tends to keep the lid on feelings and more turbulent undercurrents. Donald usually occupies The Lid Keeper role but was gone this day. His absence made The Lid Keeper role a fully unoccupied ghost role because no one was there to fill it. We were perhaps freer—for better or worse—to express our true perspectives and be more direct and confrontational with each other. The lid was off with no one to put it back on. Tim and I, because

we left the others on a day when we were short-handed to service our customers without any negotiation, were in the role of The Selfish Ones. But because we were unaware or unwilling to accept the role it remained only partially-filled. And finally and perhaps most disturbing, was role of The Nepotist, the one who enjoys favoritism because of a family relationship. The Nepotist role was partially occupied by me, but others in the company also have family relationships and enjoy benefits that stem from those connections. But no one enjoys the amount of special privileges I have received: time off for my degree, access to Donald, having the same last name as the owner and having an uncle who once ran the company. I was conscious on the surface of being in this role, but had not explored the ramifications of it or fully embodied it: the real Nepotist remained semi-conscious, or secondary, to me.

Any one of these unprocessed roles or ghost roles could have disrupted the field. But combined together they were like a time bomb waiting to go off. As a group we did not really process any of them. The one which deserves the most attention is the role of The Nepotist.

Analysis: Ghost of the Nepotist. Because of my lack of rank awareness I ended up publicly doing what I had been more quietly doing for a long time: taking advantage of the privileges I enjoy as brother of the boss, at the expense of others. My words in response to Ed's questions about why there are "two sets of rules" and why I was selfish were intended to be a self-aware admission of my side and I was sure they would de-escalate the tension; instead they were a hammer that others may have felt beaten by. This is a classic case of rank misuse, not because I was intentionally malicious towards them but because I was unaware of so much. I was not conscious of my true feelings, their perceptions, my double signals and the full extent of the unprocessed ghosts. What I did instead of picking up the accusations and giving answers from the perspective of The Enlightened Nepotist, which might have calmed the environment, was to

publicly admit that I have been misusing my considerable rank. This was like pouring gas on a fire.

My comment was offensive to everyone, especially Ed and Kevin. It was like an attack on them and it incited a full scale counterattack, and an abrupt departure from Ed. Most of us were shaken up by the way things unfolded. That meeting and what followed afterward also woke me up to the impact of my behavior.

It was easier to pour fire than to admit my own fire. In addition to being full of rank, I was also full of jealousy, hurt and the pain of being the boss' brother. But I could not access any of these more vulnerable feelings in the moment of the heat. When the moment came I fell back on the security and comfort of my rank. And there was no one awake enough to feel vulnerable or to facilitate what quickly became an explosion. I could not admit both the real privileges I enjoy and the pains I experience in being the brother of the boss. This was an inner conflict, rooted in the dual role relationship, which was never fully resolved by me. Partly because of that it was now being played out in the larger group.

In this case I was only able to admit how powerful I am because of my brother. My response may have been less laden with double signals and been better received if I could have let them know about the privileges and the challenges of this unique relationship. The privileges of being the brother of the boss are easier to talk about than the challenges.

Analysis: Challenges of being brother of the Boss. But being brother of the boss is not always easy. In a way it means I can never be just one of the gang. I feel separate from the others because of my blood relationship to Donald. It is like everyone is watching me very closely whenever personnel and other decisions are being made by Donald. This feeling different and being watched can be stressful. When the boss was dividing up accounts between the six salesmen

he said to us all, “Come to me if you think you deserve a certain account and feel free to argue for it.” I did something unusual: I became shy. I became shy about arguing for customers because I was afraid that others would perceive me as nepotistic if I got an account that could have just as likely gone to another salesman. But then when I did not go to him and I let others fight for good accounts and then hit their goals later in the year with the benefit of those good accounts while I faltered, I was left feeling angry and jealous. I also know that by virtue of my blood and my competitive nature I put Donald in an awkward position of having to decide if he is more of a boss or more of a brother to me. Being brother sometimes places us both in a terribly difficult spot. It is emotionally and relationally complex. Also, being the elder brother to Donald is sometimes tricky because I grew up as one who he looked up to, and now the roles are reversed: I look up to him. Though I do enjoy the many benefits I get from being brother, there is also a cost and a real stress underneath the surface, like a constant undercurrent in a river. I was not able to say or infer any of this at that meeting. In fact I was not even able to think of either the ups or the downs of being Donald’s brother in that moment. Both of these sides were part of the ghost of The Nepotist and did not easily come out, even with much inner work on my part.

If I had watched the feedback carefully and spoken with greater sensitivity, I might have said something more congruent with how I was feeling:

I know I let Ed and Kevin down, and in a way all of you, by leaving on Monday. I admit the way I did it was not right. I would have been pissed off too if you had done it to me. That won’t happen again. You may be jealous or angry about the privileges which I get from being brother to Donald. ... AND I DON’T BLAME YOU!

Then I would pause to watch and receive feedback and after listening, then continue:

I also want you to know, though it may be hard to hear, that there are down sides to being Donald’s brother. I experience things you may not be aware of: I feel pressure to perform because I feel if I don’t perform well my brother will be accused of favoring me; in some ways I can’t just be a regular worker here, I feel I am different—like an outsider— and more closely watched because of my blood relation to Donald.

Another pause to watch and listen before continuing:

And I also have feelings about the perks some of you get. Ed and Kevin have gotten some of the biggest accounts when we divided things up and some of those you've earned by your years here. You rightfully fought for what you wanted and felt you deserved. I did not. Part of the reason I did not was that I felt as Donald's brother that it wouldn't be fair or that I would be perceived as using that relationship for a personal advantage. And I ended up not getting some accounts I felt could have been mine and now I am not hitting my goals partly because of that.

Had I been able to speak these words, from my heart, I would have been able to embody the ghost of the Nepotist, which of course would cease being a ghost and would become simply a role in the field. This probably would have been relieving for the group.

Final results: Meeting after the meeting. This watershed meeting was flush with disturbing roles and ghost roles. It took an emotionally charged interaction to bring out the ghosts which were haunting us. The role of The Selfless Ones (those who give) clashed with the ghost of The Nepotist (the one who takes). The Nepotist was present but not recognized, mostly in me. In this sense, as I have stated, it was a partially-filled role. Though the ghosts came out the diversity within them was not fully recognized or worked with. This caused real trouble for the group. Perhaps if we had unfolded the different facets of each we might have found places where they connected and been able to have a more productive and less destructive meeting. For me, perhaps for us all, it was easier to fall back on our rank than to take a more vulnerable path that might have led to a different kind of interaction.

A week after the original meeting the salesmen met with Donald to attempt some resolution to the conflict we were feeling. At the end of that meeting, after making some limited progress, we were wrapping up. One person posed a question, "So tomorrow at 7 a.m. everyone will be asking about what happened here. What should we say?" Donald said, "Tell them to go see Tom." I saw someone roll his eyes and Donald asked more directly to all of them, "Will you

do that? Will you send them to Tom so he can explain to them and apologize?" They agreed. Then they asked me to go to everyone in the company and admit I said hurtful things at the Tuesday meeting and say that I would work to use my awareness better, including referring to Donald as "Donald Esch" and not "my brother." I agreed.

The next day I ate the humble pie and went to each person to talk about what I had done. The thought of doing it almost made me ill. It was not easy to look them in the eye and admit I had made a mistake in what I said. It was doubly hard because it meant I had to sacrifice some of my privileges *and* I was the only one who had to go around and make reparations. I felt that others also had done hurtful things but they were not willing to take responsibility and I was not willing to fully articulate what they had done. I thought that Ed should also go around and apologize for yelling at me and storming out of the Tuesday meeting. But I could not even think this thought on my own. And no one else, except me, was able to see how his actions were also hurtful. These were uncrossed edges. So in the end I mustered up all the psychological rank I could and went to each person who was not at the sales meeting and said something close to this:

I know that the way I've been acting and speaking has made things difficult and I intend to change. What I said at the Tuesday meeting was inappropriate and hurtful. It will not happen again and I will be referring to our boss as "Donald Esch" and not "my brother." And I plan to use my power around here with better awareness.

To my surprise I was warmly received by them all. It was cathartic for me and seemed to be also helpful to others. It was a constructive use of my rank and things began to slowly change for the better for us all in terms of our relationships.

It was also harder than I had imagined to change the way I referred to Donald and to stay aware of my rank. I thought it would be easy, but it took mental effort and in the first week I slipped at least twice and called him "my brother." The request to change my language really taught me that the way I referred to him really was about expressing and maintaining my

privileged spot. I like to have everyone know he is my brother because it keeps me feeling powerful and getting special perks. It also took energy to become more conscious of others ways I use my rank that make others unhappy. That part is still a work in progress.

I also bought lunch for the guys who work in the warehouse as a way to express my gratitude for all the extra things they had done for me that year, especially during the times I was away for school. They were all very appreciative of my small gesture. This whole series of happenings related to my decision to leave that Monday and my trouble-making explanation for it the next day created enough feedback for me to wake up to how I was using my rank. It was a turning point for me and my willingness to receive their feedback and act on it helped change things.

Conclusions from the Five Cases

These five cases highlight my attempts to work with rank and conflict as a facilitator and a co-worker. None of them were pleasant experiences; however they each demonstrate the potential to wake up get out of the bed of our rank-comfort. I shall give a brief summary of the core lessons from each case.

In Case #1, where I was not willing to do the leg work looking for tiny parts, I learned that both my high rank and my secondary process of “not caring” caused trouble with my co-worker from the warehouse. It took inner work and outside support for me to admit that he was right and I did not care about what he wanted me to do. I was able to wake up and change, which made for a better relationship with him. In Case #2, I learned the danger of double signals as I attempted to “help” my co-workers with their accounts. Others see our mixed messages and they get irritated with us. As we become more congruent and skillful in using our rank, even though what we say may be hard to hear, we will create less conflict. In Case #3, the one case where I

felt my intervention was successful, I learned that picking up an accusation—even if done imperfectly—can have an immediate and positive impact on a tense situation. And it was a demonstration that matching the energy of an accusation will create de-escalation, sometimes. The 4th case, where I was not very willing to take responsibility for being selfish in the warehouse with the vendor and a co-worker, was a hard one to put on paper. I learned that rank can be incredibly inebriating. Though I was in the midst of studying rank, I was misusing it generously to the detriment of myself and others. The last one, Case #5, showed the explosive power of ghost roles and how they come out in emotionally charged moments. The Nepotist role was like an emotional stick of dynamite when it finally emerged. I learned that I was unaware of some of the privileges I get as brother of the boss and needed to make some changes. Painful as it was, in the end I was able to hear the feedback and begin to change.

Four of the five cases demonstrate the salient truth of Mindell's belief that rank can be like a drug and that the more rank we have the less aware we tend to be. But these are not ultimate or permanent truths. In Case #3, I was able to use my rank to de-escalate the attacks on me and in Case #2, Donald used his rank to intervene between Ed and me and quiet a brewing conflict. I have a vision that it is possible, even in a circumstance as challenging as I chose, to be fully awake and not made drunk by rank but instead to use it for the good of all.

In these cases the village of my co-workers chose to help me out: they repeatedly and not very gently gave me the message that I was asleep to my own power and misusing my rank. In some cases my slumber was related to not seeing my secondary processes or double signals and in other cases it was shown by the act of picking up or not picking up accusations. In the final case, my somnolence was intertwined with the explosive power of ghost roles. But it is hard to sleep when the fireworks are going off. "Fortunately," says the part of me willing to endure pain for the

sake of learning, “I work with people willing to resist me and give me direct feedback.” This is a true gift and in our “Minnesota nice” culture somewhat rare. My work-village was able to give me just the wakeup call I needed. Each time I was about as happy as a bear being disturbed from hibernation, but I eventually came out of the cave of my rank-comfort and into the light of more wakefulness.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Process Work is an amazing discipline. The way it evolved is fascinating and strange. The insights of Arnold Mindell and others in the Process Work teaching community related to conflict and rank and how they function are potent. I have attempted to use and study them in at work.

Rank awareness is an essential tool for working with conflict at work or anywhere. Rank, and how it is used, can help to escalate or de-escalate conflict. It can also be the force behind the ability to empower or kill an initiative. Rank, and awareness of it, can tear down or build up an important relationship or an entire workplace improvement. Rank awareness is vital to healthy work relationships. The more rank awareness one has the better equipped they are to work with conflict; the less aware one is of rank, the less ability they will have in working with conflict at work, or anywhere else.

Because we like power and the advantages it gives us, as humans we tend to lose awareness when we gain power; we can get “drunk” on the special perks that rank brings us. We want more of the feelings we get from the sweetness of rank. At times it takes another person, who might appear to have less rank, to deliver some direct feedback or do what they can, to wake us up. It might take the revolt of an entire group. Sometimes we do not need a dramatic intervention, but can pick up more subtle clues before the explosion happens. Sometimes we are the person with lower rank, feeling the lack of power and privilege. We do our best to work against the injustice we feel. At times we are defeated by it. Hopelessness wins.

At times, when we own our rank and use it well, whether we have high or low rank, things will shift and transform. When we listen to feedback from our village, however it comes our way, the frozen ground begins to thaw. When we eat the humble pie that was baked from the heat of

our mistakes, and do what others ask of us, the environment will change in a positive direction. People will say we have changed. Things feel better. This is the power of awareness in action. This is the beauty of using rank consciously. It is honey on the lips; it is a balm of healing for a broken world.

Final Reflections

This project has been one of the most intellectually and emotionally challenging things I have done in the past two decades. I have learned so much about rank, conflict, myself and about Process Work in general. This process has brought me face to face with the power of rank and that has been a gift.

What Went Well in the Creation of This Project?

The decision to focus on my use of rank and not everyone else's worked well. It served to keep a needed boundary for ethical and time-efficiency reasons. Keeping the focus fairly limited, on rank awareness and conflict, also was a good idea. Choosing just five cases to highlight, out of the 30 or so I could have used, was also helpful. It also worked well to choose examples where I did not use my rank well. The learning, for me, was more significant in those cases where I felt like a failure.

What Did Not Go Well?

The writing was difficult, partly because I am not a natural writer, partly because the subject matter (rank) is somewhat ineffable and partly because I changed the focus fairly late in the process (October 2008.) That organic happening put pressure on me as a researcher and writer.

The research portion had two parts: experiential research and academic research. Changing the focus made both parts a challenge and seriously limited my ability to read outside

of the Process Work library. Even though this was primarily an experiential study I wanted to research more outside of the Process Work literature. So I was not able to find out enough about what other approaches have to say about rank awareness or something similar to it. On the experiential side it was a challenge to reinterpret my notes from over 30 meetings and encounters. All of these notes were made from the perspective of my original focus: to study the impact of practicing Process Work, as a facilitator, on both relationships and bottom line dollars. Moving from that to studying how I used my rank was a significant shift and may have cost me a few brain cells.

Furthermore in studying myself and my use of rank I often came up against edges, some of which seemed too big or too dangerous to cross. I also ran into my own tendencies to over-blame myself for the problem or take too much responsibility, eventually, for a conflict. This issue of taking on too much was exacerbated by the fact that I was not writing about the rank issues for others. Also Process Work is such a broad, ever-expanding, all-inclusive and eclectic discipline that writing about can be mind boggling. At times I felt lost in a sea of confused ideas.

I did not like having to be careful about what I disclosed to fellow workers about the project. Donald was apprised of the study and gave his support to it. Fortunately for me no one at work asked detailed questions about the focus of my final project. Still it felt a little odd, as I took notes all those meetings or conversations, using my co-workers as contributors to my learning, without their consent. Did I walk an ethical edge in doing this without their permission? Maybe I did. Do I feel I crossed it or violated any person or any rule? No, I do not. But it is a good question to ponder.

A Final Chorus of Critique

Here are some thoughts from imaginary critics related to what has been written above and what could be done in the future:

- “This project is too subjective. It needs to be more scientific and objective to be academically credible.”
- “It would have been better to have gotten more feedback from co-workers after certain emotional encounters to learn more about what they were truly experiencing.”
- “Why is it so focused on rank and conflict in Consensus Reality? Why not go deeper into aspects of rank and conflict found in the Dreamland and the Sentient/Essence levels?”
- “Why spend so much energy on studying and developing rank awareness during conflicts? When you are in the middle of a good fight the average person will not have enough awareness of their power and privilege to adjust their behavior.”
- “Can you prove that using rank with awareness truly contributes to working constructively with conflict?”
- “So what if you can work with conflict Tom, I am only interested if it improves the bottom line. Will better rank awareness make me more money?”
- “If salespeople are paid significantly better than support personnel then is that not a sign that they are more valuable to the company? And how does pay scale impact rank dynamics?”
- “You could have done a lot more if you could have gotten your co-workers to agree to let you work with them at a deeper level. If you did it over how could you get that to happen?”

To these critical voices I say three words: all good points. There is truth in each one. Yes, we do need more scientific research. Someone who is better at tracking numbers, and getting a buy-in from others, may one day do a more quantitative study—what are the financial results of using rank well? Maybe one day a different Process Work student will find a way to get permission from a given business to track results by conducting post-conflict interviews. Hopefully someone will delve into how rank and conflict dance together in the Dreamland and Essence/Sentient levels in the workplace. Maybe our skill levels will rise to the point that people begin to believe that awareness matters and that we can all change, even in the moment when all our buttons are pushed, and use our power more responsibly. Perhaps one day, when these future

studies are complete, what I suspect is true will be proven: that improved rank awareness will result in better working relationships which will lead to increased financial productivity.

More work also could be done on what else contributes to better awareness of rank. There must be less traumatic ways of coming into rank consciousness than people getting angry, yelling and storming out of meetings.

Directions for Future Studies

Here are four areas for future projects which could yield valuable insights. They could also further the important contribution of Process Work toward making the world a better place.

A comparison project on rank awareness. Process Work offers some very effective and unique approaches to working with interpersonal conflict, like the concepts of rank and rank awareness. I know these are effective because I have experienced them. I believe they are unique approaches to working with conflict, as compared with other approaches, but I cannot solidly claim that because I have not studied other approaches. I have not seen any literature making such comparative studies. It could be useful to compare the way other bodies of work, such as Non-Violent Communication or Appreciative Inquiry, address issues such as rank when working with conflict.

A project on identifying rank status more precisely. Mindell wrote, “Everyone has both more and less rank than someone else” (Mindell, 1995, p. 58). This is a mysterious comment. It deserves to be the subject of at least one serious study of how to identify rank status. How can someone have both more and less rank at the same time? As I mentioned earlier, Joe Goodbread pointed out that we have trouble knowing how powerful we are, especially during conflict. Joe also wrote that there is real danger, interpersonally and globally, in underestimating our rank status. Knowing that rank can change from moment to moment and from day to day, is it possible

to learn how to more accurately gauge our rank status socially, psychologically, spiritually, and/or contextually so that we neither underestimate nor overestimate it?

A project on rank and value. This study of my own rank, conducted in a for-profit culture where differences in pay can be significant, invites some interesting questions worthy of further research. What is the relationship between value, compensation and rank status? How do those who are better paid stay conscious of their rank and learn to listen to those lower on the rank scale? How can those who get paid less remain powerful and feel important in the organization? Do those who are better paid lose any rank status because of their pay level?

A project on other causes of conflict. The reader will notice that I qualify my comments in this study on rank with words like “partly,” “mostly,” and “usually.” I do this because I believe that there are many reasons for conflict, many ways to avoid it and many solutions to it. Certainly the way rank is used or misused plays a large role in how conflict is created, avoided and/or resolved. Yet I know that rank is not the only cause of interpersonal conflict, just as a high degree rank awareness is not the only solution to averting or resolving it. It would be interesting to see a study naming other causes of conflict and ways to avoid it in addition to rank awareness.

Physiological Effects of Conflict and Stress

The unhappiness of my co-worker, explained in Case #1, and my sober reflections on Jan’s comments about potential health implications of my misuse of rank led me to remember the work of Daniel Goleman. Goleman became well-known for his work with emotional intelligence, mainly through his book by that very title, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). Goleman’s more recent book, *Social Intelligence* (2006), goes into detail about the physiological effects of stress at home and work. We know that conflict is a major source of stress. In Chapter 16 of *Social Intelligence*, “Stress is Social,” Goleman reports from a variety of studies that convincingly document the

negative physical effects of stress and conflict. He reports something that many of us know by now—stress contributes directly to high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases.

Goleman summarizes studies that have measured hormones like cortisol that the body secretes during times of stress and conflict. These studies demonstrate that the release of such hormones contribute to cardiovascular disease. This is not surprising, but what is surprising and germane to this project is the finding that rank worsens the physiological effects of stress.

Studies in Sweden of workers at different levels and in the United Kingdom among civil servants show that people in the lower positions in an organization are four times more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than are those in the top rungs, who don't have to put up with the whims of bosses such as themselves. (Goleman, 2006, p. 370)

If the stressful situation is such that the person with less rank cannot respond to the “whims” and insults of those with higher rank continue then things worsen:

People who respond to insults with silence experience significant hikes in blood pressure. As the demeaning messages continue over time, the person holding back feels increasingly powerless, anxious, and ultimately depressed—all of which, if prolonged over long periods, markedly increases the likelihood of cardiovascular disease. (Goleman, 2006, p. 371).

Goleman's commentary is disturbing on many levels. Though I am not the boss of the guys in the warehouse, I am sure I added to their unhappiness by not listening better to them. It is disturbing to admit that I may have contributed, even in a small way, to greater stress in a co-worker.

The studies recounted by Goleman are an invitation for us all to commit to deeper awareness and a willingness to work through conflict more skillfully when it occurs. The way rank is used and misused is a life or death issue for some. This sounds dramatic because it is dramatic. Reading this study has only deepened my commitment to go to the depth of my reasons for wanting to remain unconscious about how I use my rank at work and elsewhere.

Addendum I

“My Way”

This song was originally written by French musicians Claude Francios and Jacques Revaux. It was titled “Comme d’Habitude” (“As Usual”) and released in 1967. The tune was given new lyrics and performed by Canadian singer Paul Anka then later made popular in the U.S. by Frank Sinatra. Now it takes a new form, re-written by me.

And now the end is near and we face the final curtain.
 My friends I say it clear and state my case of which I’m certain.
 The record shows I took some blows and gave a few not in a shy way.
 But this much still is true: I did it my way

I came to this degree to choose to leave my current profession.
 I worked like all of you and attended our hundred extra sessions.
 I did my best to act and think the process work way,
 I heard all your feedback and still did it my way.

But back while selling blades, I had a dream of milk and honey.
 I’d prove that this stuff works and earn us all even more money.
 I tried at our meetings to intervene and use my rank to keep conflict at bay.
 And though I was rebuffed, I did it my way.

And later on at work and school, I pulled my rank, I was not cool.
 I ploughed them down, I was a tank, not a speck I was a plank.
 Yes there were times I know now why, I had to eat the humble pie.
 You woke me up, I buckled down, I saw your frown took off my crown.
 And in the end, I had to bend and change this “my way”.

And so here we are, on the cusp of graduation.
 These degrees are sure to please the ego mind like a libation.
 Our rank, it may go up, it might earn us special unfairness.
 I pledge with all of you more real awareness.
 I pledge with all my heart, to do it...”our way.”

Addendum II

“Ali in Battle”

Doing inner work on the spot, during an accusation or attack, is an act of incredible awareness and maturity. We see it happening in the following poem by Persian poet Rumi. It shows an inspiring usage of contextual and spiritual rank in the midst of a battle between two warriors. It also demonstrates that often we need help from others to wake up to the reality of our rank. It takes a village to raise awareness, or in this case one very centered warrior and one feisty knight.

Ali In Battle
 Learn from Ali how to fight
 Without your ego participating.
 God's Lion did nothing
 That didn't originate
 From his deep center.

Once in battle he got the best of a certain knight
 And quickly drew his sword.
 The man helpless on the ground,
 spat in Ali's face.

Ali dropped his sword, relaxed and helped the man to his feet.
 “Why have you spared me?
 How has lightening contracted back into its cloud?
 Speak my prince, so that my soul can begin to stir in
 Me like an embryo.”

Ali was quiet and then finally answered,
 “I am God's Lion, not the lion of passion.
 The sun is my Lord. I have no longing except for the One.
 When a wind of personal reaction comes,
 I do not go along with it.
 There are many winds full of anger,
 And lust, and greed. They move the rubbish
 Around, but the solid mountain of our true nature
 Stays where it's always been.

There's nothing now
 Except the divine qualities.
 Come through the opening into me.

Your impudence was better than any reverence,
 because in this moment I am you and you are me.
 I give you this opened heart as God gives gifts:
 The poison of your spit has become the honey of friendship.” (Rumi 1997, 223, 224)

This is an amazing demonstration of rank on the part of Ali and also on the part of the defeated knight. And it all happens in a flash. Ali, the great warrior who “did nothing that didn’t originate from his deep center,” gets the best of the other knight and is ready to kill him. He has contextual and spiritual rank. With the other knight on the ground he has supreme rank in this moment and could be easily unconscious of it. He could have quickly slain his enemy. But he does not. Why not? Something happened. His awareness expanded and he refrained. Where did this awareness come from? It came, in part, from his deep center and in part from the knight on the ground who spat at him.

The knight who knows he will be killed uses his rank in the moment for all it is worth. He maintains his power and attacks Ali with all he has left: his spittle. His act of spitting is a gesture which could have caused a more torturous death than he was about to experience. But what does he have to lose? His spitting is an act of defiance and courage; it is an attempt to balance the power scales or maybe even claim his soon to be freed soul (Conversation with Kristen Wernecke, 2-17-09). Interestingly, if he had not spit at Ali he probably would have been killed by Ali. Instead his life is spared.

His spitting was like a direct accusation of Ali. It was sending a message, loud and clear: you are not worthy of my respect, you are worthy only of my spit. This behavior of the defeated knight de-escalates the violence of the situation. How can this be? As we have seen in Case #2

above, sometimes a well-timed, direct accusation can be just the medicine needed in a tense situation.

The spittle, which ironically does not “originate” from Ali’s deep center, is the wakeup call for God’s Lion. When the spit hit him perhaps Ali was shocked. Perhaps he thought, “You disgusting animal, you spit in my face, how dare you?” Perhaps he also imagined that if he were about to be killed he might have spat at his killer. Did he think, “Who am I? I am an animal also, capable of many things and about to kill this man.” Perhaps he saw both acts, of spitting and killing, as similar in essence—dehumanizing signs of hatred and disrespect. He quickly develops the awareness that he is no better or worse than his opponent, he and his enemy are actually one: “I am you and you are me”. The quickness of this insight and the fluidity Ali had to adapt to the new information is an amazing use of spiritual rank. It is especially impressive that he was able to do this in the context of a death battle. Ali drops his sword, relaxes and helps the man to his feet. The poisonous spit has become “the honey of friendship.” We can imagine them embracing on the battlefield. This is a striking transformation, especially if you have ever had the unpleasant experience of being spat at or being in a context of war. We have no doubt that this story was told all over the land. Indeed it is still being told all over the world, some eight hundred years after Rumi told it.

We would also be fortunate if we were “spat” upon and it woke us up and led to a transformed a relationship. The village is at work all around us, if we can only pay attention to it.

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