



The Energy of Love

by Dr. Nancy Oelklaus

Edited transcript of Dr. Nancy Oelklaus' speech before the Marshall Chamber of Commerce Legal Issues Seminar on April 24, 2003. After being introduced by Wendell Jones, the seminar chair, Dr. Oelklaus began her talk with a quotation.

"After we have mastered the winds, the waves and gravity, mankind will harness for God the energy of love, and then for the second time in the history of the world we will have discovered fire."

These words were written by priest and scientist Teilhard de Chardin about a century ago. "The Energy of Love" is a rather unusual topic for a professional development presentation. To begin, let me briefly explain what I mean when I say, "the energy of love."

What is The Energy of Love?

Utilizing the energy of love means creating space where other people can be happy and fulfilled. It requires saying to yourself, "I'm not responsible for their happiness, but I'm not doing anything to cause interference. I'm not saying or doing or thinking anything to cause consternation."

What things could we do or say that might cause consternation?

Author and sports psychologist Tim Galway has an answer to that. He's written a lot of books with titles that start with, "The Inner Game of..." My personal favorite is The Inner Game of Tennis, but his newest book is The Inner Game of Work. And Tim Galway says interference occurs when we engage in thinking blame, or criticism, or judgment. It is interference when we engage in gossip, when we withhold or defend.

Scientists are telling us now that each of us throws out about 25 feet of...we call them vibes in the vernacular...and these waves are going out from us and being picked up at subconscious levels by everybody who is within our territory. This is the space that I'm talking about.

Our goal should be to send the energy of love through that space, which is an energy of acceptance. It is a feeling of well-being toward every other person.

An Example from Real-Life

In his introduction, Wendell Jones said that we worked together in Marshall. Actually, we worked under the same roof in Marshall. That's a more precise statement. Truthfully, I don't ever remember having any incident with Wendell that was a conflict, but our relationship was a constant conflict. It was always just underneath the surface, a hum of anxiety that penetrated every communication.

Anyway, that was just what it was, and everyone juggled and jockeyed around it. Have you ever been in a meeting with two people who have that kind of relationship?

I used this example in a speech several years ago, and a teacher in the audience came up to me after the presentation. She had been teaching at a middle school during the time Wendell and I were working under the same roof.

She said, "I always knew something was wrong, but I never knew what it was."

I was astonished to realize that a low-level conflict, that I thought I was keeping secret from everybody, was being felt in a classroom. It rippled all the way across the district, from the Administration Building into a classroom.



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And I often wonder if Wendell and I might have done more good for the Marshall schools, if we had managed to have a conversation while we were still working together like the one we had after I left.

I'll tell you now what healed our relationship.

What I See is Not What I'm Looking At, It's What I'm Looking With

A couple of years after I left Marshall, I came back for a visit. I had an appointment with the Superintendent at that time, Brian Nichols. I arrived about ten minutes early for the appointment. As I started down that long central corridor of the Administration Building, I passed Wendell's door.

Without even thinking, I opened that door. I don't know what force put my hand on that doorknob, but I went in and he greeted me with something very polite. I imagine he was thinking, "Oh, no. I thought I got rid of her," but he's a gentleman and a professional. He said, "Well, hello, Nancy, how are you?" and for the first time, I didn't give him a canned, polite answer.

I said, "Well, Wendell, I've been through some really tough times, but I'm okay now." And then, I shared with him, just briefly, some heartbreaking things that were going on in my life.

He listened.

He was empathetic.

When I finished my story, he told me a story from his own life that was very similar to what I had experienced. Although he never spoke the words, I got the message from him loud and clear, "I understand."

Soon, the ten minutes were up and it was time for me to go to my appointment. And as we stood and said goodbye, feelings swept over me that I now recognize as grace and forgiveness and reconciliation. We never uttered those words. We just shared the experience.

Today, Wendell Jones is one of my dearest and most cherished friends. It's always a joy to hear from him, knowing there was a day he wouldn't have walked

across the street to say hello to me. I am so grateful for that healed relationship.

There were a lot of things I didn't understand when I was working under the same roof with Wendell. I didn't understand that what I focus on gets stronger. And that what I see is not what I'm looking at, it's what I'm looking with.

In fact, I had to go all the way to Indonesia for this lesson to become clear.

What I Focus on Gets Stronger

I was hired by the Jakarta International School to do two days of consulting with their administrators and lead teachers from the middle school through the high school. I had carefully prepared an agenda because this is a well-known international school. Teachers from all over the world come to this school to teach the children of executives of primarily US companies. I felt it was an important assignment, and I had made careful preparation.

As I started on the first day, I noticed a tall, dark and handsome young man at one of the tables. To be more exact, I noticed that he was frowning. As I got further into the presentation, he raised his hand and said, "I'm experiencing some cognitive dissonance."

I didn't even know what cognitive dissonance was, but I understood that he was unhappy with what I was saying. I started into extreme mental gymnastics, asking myself "How can I change this? What do I need to do to pull him in and make him my friend?" I was taxing myself tremendously.

By the time lunch rolled around, he had recruited two other people at his table. Now I had three people frowning, and I decided to stay in the room and work instead of going to eat lunch and take care of my own physical needs.

So, I worked through lunch, and the only reward was that by the end of the day, he'd recruited the whole table. They were all frowning at me. My fear was very great that by the end of the second day, those frowns would have circulated throughout the whole room.



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I would be an international failure. (I had quite an ego problem...)

When I went back to the hotel, I reorganized the workshop, arranging it as I thought he would like. One of the principals had invited me to go out to eat that night and I went with her. She turned to me during the meal and said, "I think the workshop is just fabulous."

I said, "Really? I think it's awful."

She looked shocked. "Why?"

I started trying to explain. I said, "Well, I just don't feel like I have the group with me. I'm not connecting. I'm just not getting through." I stumbled and stammered, trying to explain what was going on with me.

She finally shrugged and said, "Well, whatever you think, but I think everything's going just fine."

I went back to the hotel and went to bed. At three a.m., I sat straight up in bed with the full realization of what I was doing.

Isn't that how it is? When we get really relaxed, our brains quiet down. They are able to deliver the answer that eludes us during the day when our anxiety is too great to let it come through.

I jumped out of bed and said to myself, "I know what I'm doing wrong! I'm trying to please this young man. He's only one person. A lot of the other people seem to be just fine. I'm going to put this workshop back into its original design, and I'm going to focus on the faces that are open."

The next morning, I went into the classroom and I didn't even look at that table. I looked only at the faces that were nodding and seemed to be interested in what I had to say. At the break, I sneaked a peek over toward that table and discovered, to my gratification, that he was the only person not smiling. The people he had recruited the day before were now with me.

At lunch on the second day, the principal I had had dinner with the night before came up to me and said, "Now, I see what you're talking about! It's Peter. Don't

pay any attention to him. He frowns all the time."

An Important Lesson

I learned that it never was about me. It was about Peter. And I learned that when I focused on his distress, what I got was more distress. But when I focused on the faces that were open, I got more faces that were open. That's how I learned that what I focus on gets stronger. And that what I see is not so much what I'm looking at, as what I'm looking with.

Psycho-Babble or Valuable Information?

I used to think that ideas like this were "soft skills". I scoffed at them. When I was in school administration, we didn't want those motivational speakers. We wanted the people who would give us hard facts and tasks that would make us better.

I really didn't know what I was talking about.

I'm very grateful that today there is actual data that shows us what discord in an organization actually costs, in dollars and cents.

The Dana Mediation Institute has done a fabulous job of creating a research-based formula, where organizations can compute what the human conflicts in their organization are actually costing them. They can learn what the real toll is on their bottom line.

If you're interested in knowing more about their research, go to www.MediationWorks.com.

Here, I want to give you some experiences out of my own life that demonstrate the results of that research in real-life examples.

Discord Can Be Expensive

A few years ago, I worked with one of the schools in the Dallas suburbs at their Administrative Retreat. We stayed at a lake resort location for about a day and a half, and the dominant topic during the whole period was the behavior of the Maintenance Director, who was not present.



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Everybody had a horror story about the Maintenance Director and by the time we concluded the retreat, at the end of the day and a half, we had not found a solution. Well, I don't like to leave things like that, so I made a follow up call to the supervisor of the Maintenance Director, who had been present for the retreat, and I said, "Let's just do a quick computation about what this is costing the school district. Let's take your time alone, the time required on your part to put out the fires this person has started."

We did a little quick computing and then I said, "Okay, now how about the time that all of the principals in the district are spending putting out these fires and trying to manage this behavior?" So we computed that time, and it added up to around \$600,000 over a five-year period. For a school district, this was an enormous sum.

This calculation does not even take into consideration the Opportunity Cost, which is the value of the things they might they have been doing with their time, instead of managing this one person's behavior.

There is a happy end to that story. A lot of people believe that when personalities clash or when there are behavioral issues like that, there is nothing you can do. You just have to tolerate it. This is not the truth. There are processes and tools that they simply were not using. When we started applying them, I'm happy to say that the Maintenance Director made a decision to change his behavior.

The last time I checked, which was at the end of that academic year, he was doing just fine. That's a happy ending.

Discord Can Be Fatal (to the Organization)

I have some other clients in the Austin area, business clients, who have not had such a happy ending to the same story, and one in particular comes to mind. A young man who had been in business for about 8 years, who believed the only thing he had to do was know electronics and pay attention to the bottom line.

One of his key employees led an insurrection and he took all of the skilled employees with him to another

company. Next, they started spreading the word throughout the whole Austin area, in this industry, that this was a terrible company to work for. He couldn't find any skilled employees who would work for him, so he was faced with the prospect of having to go out and hire unskilled employees, and train them, to keep his business alive.

The training was not simple. It wasn't a two-day workshop. It was electronics and engineering. He lost half of his business in a three-year period of time, which is a lot more than most stockbrokers have lost, even in this current economy.

Discord Can Lead to Disorganization

Sometimes when there is conflict in an organization, a leader tries to structure around it. In other words, they restructure the organization to accommodate the conflict, when the original structure may have served the organization better. I have a client who is involved in this activity right now.

Here's his situation: He had three companies. They were all strong companies. They were in the same industry, and his dream was to create an umbrella organization where these companies would work together synergistically. Each would contribute to the success of the other, so that there was an upward-spiraling escalation of success in all the companies. It was a great design.

The only problem was the managers of the three companies didn't get along. So, now, my client is in the process of restructuring his companies. The dream is lost.

He's creating what I call a columnar structure where these three companies will act like columns. None of them touches the others. He is creating an organization based on rigidity and resentment, and he is already seeing the profits slide.

Discord Has Physical Effects

I would like to make one final point about the financial cost of conflict or uneasy working relationships. When we have to work under anxiety for a period of time, the



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brain releases cortisol, which is then distributed throughout our entire system. Over time, it attacks the body's immune system. People get sick. You can easily predict what these costs are: absenteeism, turnover, increased health care costs.

I work with individuals to develop communication skills that create safe space for their employees to fulfill their potential and be happy at work, and still make good business decisions and maintain a strong, healthy organization.

What we focus on gets stronger.

What we see is not what we're looking at, but what we're looking with.

Daily Application of Simple Ideas

To take advantage of these valuable lessons, a fundamental change in our own thinking has to occur.

Now you might say, "Wow, that sounds like a really big job," but let me show you how simple it can be. I said simple, I didn't say easy.

This story was told to me by a middle school principal in upper New York state. Her office was located at the end of a long corridor that she walked down every morning before greeting students and teachers in the central corridor.

She started saying, to herself, a specific mantra as she walked down that hallway. She said, "Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile."

Try it right now. Sit up real straight and get ready to take a really deep breath. Your brain is going to love it, because it's an influx of fresh oxygen.

Let's try it.

"Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile."

She did that about three times as she walked down the corridor. The very first morning that she did it, she noticed an immediate change. She was saying the same things to people that she always said. She was

saying, "Oops, you dropped a book," and "Would you pick up that paper?" and "You forgot to close your locker," but their response was different. It was friendlier. They smiled. They said thank you. No one frowned and was surly.

She said, "The results I got were phenomenal and all I did was change my own state of mind."

Remember that 25-foot area where we are sending out vibes? Well, changing your state of mind to change your environment works and it works in all situations. I have clients who tell me that, before they go into important negotiations now, they think a mantra that will serve them and be positive in that negotiation. Things turn out well for them.

25 Feet of Powerful Influence

In fact, I had one client who perfectly illustrates this behavior. She works in the high-tech arena. She is very attractive, very well-educated, and a very highly-skilled young woman.

She came to me as an individual coaching client, trying to decide whether or not to quit her job. The reason she wanted to quit her job was that the people she worked with were stupid and arrogant and she wanted to find a company where the people were not stupid and arrogant. She decided to quit and she did...and then she couldn't find another job.

Her resume was perfect. Everything looked good. She was getting interviews, but she wasn't getting hired. She came in one day to see me, and just slammed everything down on the desk as she said, "I don't understand it. I went for an interview yesterday. I was perfect for the job. The guy who was interviewing me just didn't know what he was doing. He asked bad questions. He didn't bring out of me what I can really do. I don't understand it."

"Well, would you like some insight?" I asked.

She said, "Yes, that's why I'm here. Tell me. What do I need to do?"

I replied, "Okay, let's start with this. Tell me what you



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were thinking when you walked in for that interview."

"Well, I was very confident. I was thinking I was perfect for the job."

"Okay," I said slowly, "Now, tell me one more time, what was it you were thinking about the man who was interviewing you?"

"Well, he really wasn't doing a very good job."

"So, you were thinking, I'm perfect and you're not very good?"

And at the point, she said, "Oh my gosh, do you mean I'm doing this to myself?"

And I said, "Maybe. That vibrational field may be picking up the dissonance. He can't read your mind, so he doesn't know the exact words you're thinking, but he obviously picked up the disharmony. So, let's try to find something different for you to say to yourself when you go in for your next interview."

And we did.

She happens to be a Christian, and there's actually some research on the most powerful thing a Christian can say before going into a stressful situation, which is, "Thy will be done."

At the very next interview, as she went in, she was thinking, "Thy will be done. Thy will be done. Thy will be done." And guess what? She got the job.

What we focus on gets stronger. And what we see is not so much what we're looking at, but it's what we're looking with.

To take advantage of this power, our first and foremost task is to find our "eyes of love," to find our eyes of acceptance, to find our eyes of no interference in that space, no blaming, no judging, no defending, no withholding, no criticizing, no gossiping. In that space, people can be all that they can be.

Here's a poem I wrote once that describes this safe space:

Rushing water is the only sound I hear, punctuated by the occasional call of the cardinal atop the tallest tree and the swish of light wind through the tall pines. My eyes follow the sound to the cantilevered boulders and terraced pools that guide the water's path through this place that bridges mountain and valley. Cool droplets glance my shins as I jockey, positioning my body for the best view. But there is no best view, precisely why I feel so safe in this place.

Here, I know I will not be abused by someone's idea of what I need to do to be the best. My laurels don't matter. Neither do yours. No measuring. No comparing. No pertinent questions, "Why don't you . . . ? Why can't you . . . ? Have you ever thought about . . . ?" Just peace.

No leapfrogging or catapulting here. Every rock has its unique place in the water's glide and fall. Every tree. Every fallen leaf and insect. Every patch of sky and wispy cloud.

So I come here in silence. In reverence. In the serenity that knows I am accepted. Simply accepted.

Harnessing the energy of love begins with simple acceptance. The power is phenomenal.



About the Author

With the advantage of a 25-year career in education as a top-level administrator in a school district, as well as entrepreneurial leader of a state education association, Dr. Nancy Oelklaus has been a leader in the fields of organizational development, change, systems thinking, and adult learning. Her national and international experience brings diversity to her work, which is grounded in a knowledge base of the brain and systems thinking. She is the founder of the Success Accelerator Brain Trust™; a nonjudgmental personal development coaching process which builds upon inner strengths and provides solutions for weaknesses.