

## Leadership, energy and empowerment – working with Spirit.

*All of our work (be it community work, training, or professional supervision or mentoring) is focussed on and informed by one question: how can we develop Spirit in ourselves and others? This modified extract from 'Weaving Tapestries: a handbook for building communities' gives a very brief overview of this concept.*

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### “Pay Attention”<sup>1</sup>

‘Spirit’ meant, originally “the breath of life”. Imagine life without it. It would be like a person drowning. A person drowning thinks only of the next moment – just trying to stay alive rather than focusing on the wider picture. A person drowning lashes out – even at people who are trying to help them. A person drowning grabs at anything to try to get that breath back into their lungs. And a person drowning, finally, ceases to care, gives in.

A person who can’t “breathe” their spirit can be much the same. If my spirit is choked I can think only of the next moment, not the wider community picture. I lash out at others around me, even those who want to help me. I consume and consume, grabbing at anything to fill up the hole left by my choked spirit. And I give in, cease to care, get apathetic. Our communities are full of people feeling like this. And we often feel like this ourselves.

How can we help re-ignite this Spirit – help it breathe – for our self or for others? The simple answer is – pay attention. Pay attention to the true person you are with. There are three ‘sources of Spirit’ that we need to pay attention to:

**Experience** – what we have taken in from the world.  
Everyone has had an extraordinary life and rich experiences.

**Action** – what we give back out to the world.  
We all have, within us, things that we want or love to do, things that we’re good at, things that we want to strive for.

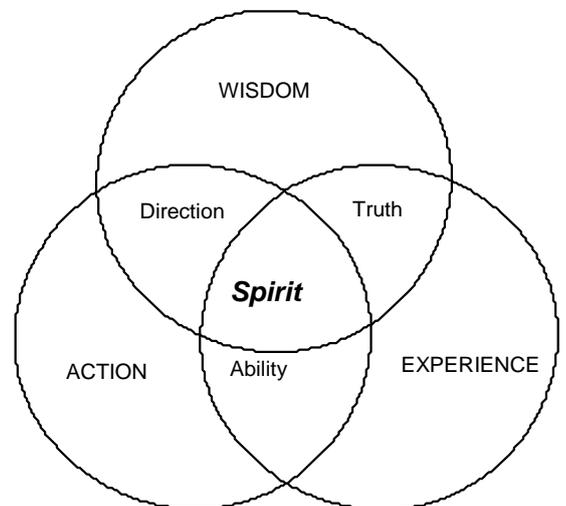
**Wisdom** – “the part of us that knows”. Some people call this “intuition” – the part of us that knows the right answers, even when we are not yet able to articulate why.

When we pay attention to **both Experience and Wisdom** we are rewarded with “**Truth**” – a clarity about those things we believe and that matter to us.

When we pay attention to **both Action and Wisdom** we are rewarded with “**Direction**” – a clarity about where we want to head next in our life or work.

When we pay attention to **both Experience and Action** we are rewarded with “**Ability**” – the capacity to do certain things with ease, therefore allowing us to move on to ever-increasing challenges.

If we have strong truths, strong directions and strong abilities, then our “**Spirit**” will be strong, and we’ll contribute much more effectively to our selves, our families, our communities and our society. When we **pay attention** to these things, then we actively develop (‘unwrap’) Spirit, and thus contribute, enormously, to our communities.



<sup>1</sup> (David Nourish introduced me to the importance of paying attention)

And notice this: when we ignore (or ridicule, or disallow) these things (eg, by putting the strategic plan, the committee agenda, the funding guidelines, the majority view, ahead of the person we're next to) then we actively choke Spirit. Truth, Direction and Ability is diminished in that person. They won't be 'with us in Spirit'. At best, they'll be there out of duty.

***The extent to which we are required to work outside of our own truths, directions and abilities is the extent to which we will 'burn out' – our spirit will be choked.***

It's essential, then, as community workers, managers professionals, or just as human beings, to really pay attention to the people we work with, so that can bring their full and true selves to their engagement with others.

**A few examples:**

When we are trying to engage a person with the community, we often ask if they'd like to join a committee. Instead, we could listen to their experiences, their preferred actions, and their wisdom. They will feel heard and known and valued. Then the conditions will be right to discuss what opportunities exist in the town, the organisation or the movement, allowing them to move to a place where they may be enthusiastic and valued.

People often join committees out of duty, and are not 'there in spirit'. Related to this, the same people are often on a large number of committees. The dynamic here is that only a small number of people will respond to this sense of 'duty'. Perhaps we need to think and talk more creatively about how people can become engaged in community. If I have time and energy for, say, 12 hours a month of un-paid time to give to my community, and I'm on 4 committees, then virtually all my 'hours' are gone. That takes time away from the time organising a street barbecue, or helping the neighbour who has 3 kids under 5, or welcoming a new family to the street, or bringing together two or three Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal friends informally to talk about possibilities for reconciliation activities in the town.

So by 'getting people involved' in a streetscape committee, or a management committee, when this is not where their spirit thrives, is actually reducing the capacity of the community, rather than building it. Better, maybe, to have a small, passionate, efficient and 'program' focussed committee, and encourage others to follow their spirit elsewhere.