

# The Focusing Connection

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

## EDITORIAL

### Interactive Focusing

by Janet Klein

Interactive Focusing arose from my own Focusing-based partnership practice. Focusing, and especially Focusing in pairs or partnership, had the quality of an interaction but came with the injunction that there was to be no interaction. In the early 1980s, when I was learning Focusing, we were told partnerships or exchanges were to be treated as and to remain transactions, a complete and separate transaction for each party. When the listener became the Focuser, she wasn't to touch the first Focuser's material.

During the late 1980s I was facing divorce, and I was looking for some way to connect deeply and meaningfully with others. I was looking for an interaction. I wanted to touch... and I wanted to be touched. I treasured Focusing as that thing which allowed my deeper or unknown or confused parts to come into focus. Through Focusing I was touching into my core in a way I hadn't previously known - through the inner experiencing of it. That I would join the two, Focusing and my desire to connect in a deep and authentic way with another person, just seemed a matter of time. And so, Interactive Focusing was born.

The first part of the process is just like a Focusing partnership. One person Focuses while the other listens. When the Focuser has revealed a reasonable part of her story, usually taking ten or so minutes, there is a transition to the *empathic moment*.

*The empathic moment.* I discovered the need for an empathic moment many years ago while I was in an Interactive Focusing process with a friend. After he told a part of his story, we paused to transition to the Interactive Response where I would sense into what got touched in me. Then I would Focus and he would listen. However, it was such a feeling-filled moment that I asked if we could take a little time right there to



appreciate what just happened. His story evoked a densely-felt sense of empathy in me. I wanted to savor it, and I wanted him to have time to appreciate what just went on for him. We refined this moment, over time, to what we called the "golden moment" and later the "empathic moment." I felt it was a golden moment because, even though I was listening empathically to my friend's story, it wasn't until the empathic moment that I really and deeply sensed into empathy. The empathy seemed pure, unencumbered by the struggle to make accurate and meaningful reflections. I'd struck gold, so to speak. It was at that moment that a great shift occurred for me: I got how it was for him. It opened up a whole new world of possibility - seeing his experience from his side at such a deep level of experiencing for me. Also, I realized, over time, it was in this experience that my empathic capacity was enlarging, growing, developing. Eventually, we learned how to put that moment into words using the distilled and powerful poetic expression of imagery and metaphor. The empathic moment is, of course, adding something new to the Focusing partnership, but it is at the point of the Interactive Response that

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Interactive Focusing, created by Janet Klein with the help of Mary McGuire, has inspired many people who are looking for ways to bring the depth of Focusing into interpersonal relationships. In her article in this issue, Janet tells the story of the birth of Interactive Focusing, and offers a brief introduction to this simple yet subtle and profound method. I'm excited that Janet has a book about Interactive Focusing now available.

I have heard that migraine headache pain is one of the most severe and frightening chronic pains that a human can experience. So it is a great pleasure to bring you Christine Langeveld's article on how Focusing helped her change her relationship with her migraines, so that they ceased. I believe her remarkable story is applicable to any kind of chronic pain, and I'm eagerly looking forward to Part Two of her article. (Daniel Bärlocher, whose presentation on headaches inspired Christine, has a new book out: *Schmerzen lindern mit Focusing*.)

As a follow-up to his article entitled, "Wholebody Focusing - In Everyday Living" (TFC Nov 2000), Kevin McEvenue offers an example of how Wholebody Focusing helped his partner Paul Huschilt at a very critical moment in his life. This is also a remarkable story. Paul's example shows how valuable is Kevin's contribution to Focusing, that he calls "WholeBody Focusing."

Bebe Simon's contribution to Focusing is not as recognized as it should be, in my opinion. Certainly she has contributed enormously to my work. When I first heard Bebe Simon say, around 1981, "ask it where it would like to be moved," I felt my word turn upside down. "It" is alive! "It" is worthy of respect! My relationship to Focusing was never the same. ☺



# The Focusing Connection

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this process truly veers off from the direction of the partnership model.

*The Interactive Response.* The Interactive Response adds balance to the process. It is the time of transition when roles are exchanged. The listener asks, "What got touched in me by the Focuser's story? What is here for me right now about all of that?" She now becomes the Focuser and shares this with her listener. This makes it an interactive process - touching each other and then sharing about this interior touching. It is essential that the Interactive Response come after the empathic moment as the shift in the empathic moment opens up the interaction in a very positive way, leading to responding in an empathic, accepting and compassionate way denuded of hostility or the smaller, meaner parts of ourselves. This is the power of empathy, of getting it from the other person's side.

*The Relationship Check.* I have long felt that each relationship needs a *relationship check*, a simple "where are we with each other right now?" It isn't unusual for a marriage to dissolve with one party being completely unaware that the marriage was even in trouble. During and after the intensity of an interaction, I am especially curious to know how the other person is being affected by what I am revealing. It helps me feel safe to keep this information visible by sharing it - but this has been a deeply taboo subject. Breaking this taboo is a healthy and healing gesture in relationship. It asks for sensing into our truth in the moment and sharing it. This candor and transparency gives us guidance. We have put this at the end of the process. This allows for a certain kind of closure to this particular session as well as an opening, a jumping-off place for further processing.

*Feedback.* Built into this model is something I call *Focuser-as-teacher* feedback. This is the major teaching tool for enhancing empathy. It is the Focuser who can guide her listener to listen empathically. Common sense tells us that it is only the Focuser who can help the listener to be an empathic listener for this particular Focuser, as only this Focuser knows when she feels empathically heard. She is her own best expert. She can give feedback about how she needs to be heard and when she feels heard. As a listener, I have had the weight of needing to listen "perfectly" lifted from my shoulders. It becomes a partnership. My Focuser will

help me listen to her in the way that feels right to her.

Interactive Focusing is intended as a relationship process. It can be used when you have a "deep truth" you want to share with someone else. You can use it when you have something positive to share in the relationship - something you treasure about the other person, something you appreciate that the other person has done for you, and so on. When just learning Interactive Focusing, these first two instances are recommended. It is also a very useful process when there is friction between two people. If it is an intense and longstanding problem, having an experienced coach is advisable.

Interactive Focusing makes room for empathy in a way heretofore not explored, both through the experience-by-experience healing listening and the empathic moment. It engenders empathic growth and development. Healing listening is bodysense-to-bodysense communication. The empathic moment is the "golden moment" of the interaction, the moment of concentrated, deepened empathy and the felt shift during which the entire relationship often turns.

It is a model of balance. It is non-authoritarian and non-hierarchical. It empowers the Focuser to give the listener guidance in the form of feedback about the level and accuracy of empathic listening. This seminal feature brings the pair into empathic alignment, *from the Focuser's side.*

I think Interactive Focusing was sitting on the sidelines just waiting to be discovered. It's a natural process and a natural outgrowth of Focusing and Focusing partnerships. After having practiced it for many years, I find it always familiar, like a very old and dear friend, and always mysterious and unknown, and I am filled with trepidation as well as the excitement of new discovery. Perhaps what I like best about it is the sense of deep connection to another person I find through practicing it, even when the process may have been undertaken in the face of disagreement and dispute. ♥

*Interactive Focusing was developed by Janet Klein with the help of Mary McGuire. Janet and Mary will be teaching a workshop called Interactive Focusing for Therapists and Counselors July 19-21, 2002 in NYC. A portion of this article is excerpted by Janet from her new book, Interactive Focusing Therapy, which may be ordered through her. Janet may be reached at janetklein@att.net or phone 847-864-3727.*