



ATTRACTORS
THE INFO-LETTER OF THE
HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE
VOLUME 6.2
FEBRUARY 2009

*Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics.
In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on*

INTERSECTIONS

Intersections are always interesting. The one meets the other, the rules change, and surprising things can happen. In communities and organizations, we have many different names for intersections:

- Joint ventures
- Collaborations
- Partnerships
- Teams
- Mergers
- Cross-functional anything
- Supervision or management
- Change management
- Conflict resolution
- Customer service
- Communities of practice
- And

In fact, it may be that everything of interest in a business lies at some intersection. Is that also true of personal dynamics? What intersections influence your personal wellbeing? Exercise, breathing, eating, sleeping. What intersections influence your social wellbeing? Friendships, family reunions, weddings, births and deaths, block parties. What intersections influence your intellectual wellbeing? Classes, experimentation, dialogue, reading. Undoubtedly your emotional and spiritual healths also depend on generative intersections.

If this is true for you, as it is in my experience with self, associates, and clients, then intersection management becomes a core competency for human performance. What do we mean when we talk about "intersection management"? Over the years, we've observed that some people and organizations thrive at intersections. They learn and grow; their quality improves; they shine. On the other hand, others become less effective—either locking into place to protect themselves or coming unglued completely. Here are some promising practices, derived from ancient wisdom of breathing, for making the most of the intersections in your life and work.

Pay attention. The first step in learning from your breath is to pay attention.

Intersections are full of surprises. From one moment to the next, you will see and hear and understand things that were totally invisible to you before. To make the most of the opportunity, you need to be awake and aware as things change so that you can exert influence over yourself and others in the moment of decision.

We encourage some of our clients to begin each meeting with a simple question, “What have you noticed since we were together last?” This little ritual reminds people to pay attention and to attend to what they notice.

Distinguish the incoming from the outgoing. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Mechanically the reason for this is simple—it sets up a full circle of motion. When you breathe in and out through your nose, there is a point of reversal in the motion that brings with it turbulence and unnecessary distraction.

The same is true with personal and institutional intersections. You will continually have information coming in from the other side, and you will continually be sending messages as well. The more you can establish a smooth flow from you to them and back again, the sooner you can begin to work effectively as one, rather than a turbulent two.

Our Adaptive Action Process of observe, decide, and act is designed to establish this kind of smooth and transforming cycle between sending and receiving signals at intersections.

Know the difference between shallow and deep breathing, and choose carefully. Serious practitioners know a wide variety of breaths. They choose different ones to build energy, calm, strength, or endurance.

Standing at an intersection, you, too, should distinguish between deep and shallow. Some actions reach deep into your being with the power for fundamental transformation. Others are superficial interactions, destined to move the whole forward while leaving the self intact. When you are facing another across an intersection, you can choose whether your engagement is essential or not. Neither is better or worse, but you want to choose consciously as you balance potential risk against potential benefit.

In times of turbulent change, we encourage ourselves and our clients to be aware of the “differences that make a difference.” When we know what is core and what is not, when we can make good decisions about when to compromise at an intersection and when to hold tight.

Reflect and adapt. As your breathing begins to settle in, your physical, mental, and emotional selves will shift. You may relax or get tense, feel dizzy, or lose track of time. As you are conscious of your own reaction, you will shift tactics to maintain a healthy balance.

In your personal and private intersections, the reflection and adaptation cycles are equally important. We use three questions—What?, So what?, and Now what? They help us stay focused and balanced while we are open to change. When we enter an intersection with these three questions playing over and over again in our minds, then we are able to move into them with courage, move through them with grace, and exit from them with new opportunities.

This summer we will enter into a new and thrilling intersection. I will join Wendy Morris and the ALIA Institute (<http://www.aliainstitute.org/institute/home.html>) for a week-long adventure at the Shambala Summer Institute. Not only will we have a chance to practice our own intersection skills, we will help others develop their capacities as well. In this module participants will

- learn how to work with a system when it is not under your control (which is always!)
- see and name the patterns that shape complex change in your own context
- practice asking questions that move you and others beyond symptoms to real causes and solutions
- embody your learning through movement improvisation, composition/design thinking, contemporary arts and mindfulness training
- engage in collective inquiry that is simultaneously playful and rigorous

I am eager to engage at the intersection of mind and body with Wendy, who is a master in using movement to access the power of human systems dynamics. Together we are excited about engaging with the team at ALIA who bring a wide range of gifts to authentic leadership. I hope you will consider coming with us to breathe new life into the intersections that shape your personal and professional performance. For more information, contact info@aliainstitute.org.

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