



ATTRACTORS
THE INFO-LETTER OF THE
HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE
VOLUME 6.6
JUNE 2009

*In this month's **Attractors**, Glenda Eoyang, Ph.D., shares her real-time experience at Shambhala Institute, where she is facilitating a module this week. We invite you to discuss this topic. Please share your thoughts and insights with us as we continue to hear from Glenda throughout the week.*

I am spending this week at the Shambhala Institute in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I pause tonight, in the middle of this complex and ever-changing white water rafting trip, to reflect on what I am learning and how it might inform me, my colleagues, and our various institutions and communities.

When I arrived, the first question was, "What is your question?" I often begin training sessions in the same way, and standing on the other side, I gained new appreciation for the challenge this poses for my students. My response, inspired by my friend Wendy Morris who was inspired by her friend Arawana Hayashi:

How can I see with my back?

This question enfolded a whole range of notions about me, my world, my practice, and gaps in all of them that need filling. I want to know how I can:

- Anticipate the future, which I cannot see, while my past lies so plainly in my front-focused view.
- Stimulate my capacity to perceive things that lie beyond my current perspective.
- Be aware of the world that surrounds me—360 by 360 degrees.
- Develop connections with what lies beyond my own habitual blindness.
- Lead into the future, being sensitive to the needs and resources of those who follow.

On Saturday morning, it seemed an impossible quest, but it also carried a sense of urgency for me and those I serve. We all face greater and greater challenges as our worlds transform around us. To survive we will need profound flexibility of thought and action. To thrive, we will have to cultivate new and more sensitive ways to see what was invisible before. We need the support of all of our faculties at their highest level of performance if we are to succeed in the uncertain, but certainly turbulent, future. Though my quest is far from complete, I have begun to see how I might turn my back into a sensing organ.

I have learned that boredom can be a gateway to innovation. When the repetition of thought or action is unbearable, then someone somewhere does something exciting. If we can learn patience and focus, our systems may generate their own creative phase shifts.

I have learned what it feels like for sound to come into and through my whole body. When my eyes are closed, my mind is quiet, and my body is attuned, I feel the vibrations of sound and distinguish them from "noise." If my teams can listen in this way, we may build the capacity to adapt more adroitly.

I have learned that creative process can be a bridge between thought and action. When I practice noticing, deciding, and acting in the context of jazz or improvisation or dance or calligraphy, I build capacity to notice, decide, and act in response to real-world situations. Each of my actions takes on more natural grace and accuracy.

I have learned to trust in the teaching/learning expertise of others, even when my own intuitions are challenged. When I let go of my expectations and assumptions and follow another's process to completion, both the journey and the outcome can be gloriously rewarding. Seeing with my back is transformed into seeing through her front.

I have learned that some people learn in action, not just from the metaphors that mimic action. My knowing is stored in words, but some others store knowing in sense and sinew. For them, teaching and learning come alive in action at a particular place and in a particular time.

I have learned that when people talk about "energy," "field," and "gestalt," they are talking about what we call "pattern." We name and operationalize the concept in different ways to make it actionable, depending on how we understand our capacities to act.

I have learned how phenomenology can be a sensual experience.

I have learned some really good philosophical jokes.

I have learned that listening can be a meditative practice.

I have learned that if I loan my (often forgotten and unused) camera I get great pictures and a new friend.

I have learned that I can speak slowly and still express my overwhelming enthusiasm for human systems dynamics.

I have learned new things about the wisdom of youth and the exuberance of age.

I have learned that I can hear the music of self-organizing processes, even when a group works in silence.

I have learned that in at least one language, kids are referred to as "the ones I live for."

And this is only Tuesday!

As all good questions do, this one has transformed itself even before it is completely answered. Today, a new question emerges:

Would you like to see with **your** back?

If so, join me for further discussion at the HSD Institute blog *Patterns at Work*: <http://www.patternsatwork.blogspot.com/>

Glenda H. Eoyang, Ph.D.

www.hsdinstitute.org

866-HSD-INST