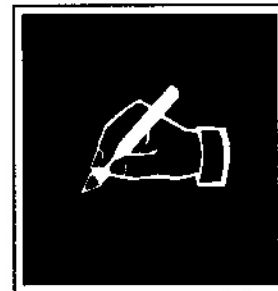


In Touch



The Newsletter of The FELDENKRAIS GUILD®

The Feldenkrais Method®

Functional Integration®

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Awareness Through Movement®

The six BIG issues of 1994

by Michael Purcell, President

Many of us have some burning issue or other about the Guild and our profession. Being an officer of the Guild organization places one in a unique position in this regard, not only because we regularly experience and think about so many issues which are brought to us or raised by us, or because we have easier access to information than most members, but we are the ones who are most often lobbied for change, and we also have to shoulder immediate responsibility for the functioning of the organization. I would like to speak from my perspective, realizing that my experience may be totally different than yours, but that it is a perspective which I hope takes in many factors in the functioning of the Guild and the interests of several segments of the membership.

Though I call this "The six BIG issues of 1994", you may be surprised to find that events which may have seemed to some like big issues at a given time, do not necessarily make my list; in fact I don't generally see specific incidents or causes as issues. I see the issues as the underlying problems that give rise to points of contention, and, frankly, there is a good chance that these will continue to be the big issues in 1995 and 1996 as well.

The following is more of a list than an in-depth discussion of each issue; each one of these could be the focus of a much longer discussion with multiple perspectives. Many of these are concerns which I have addressed here before:

#1. Practitioner Income — It is sad but true that this remains the number one concern for many practitioners. Quite a few are still not making the income they would like or deserve. Some are still wondering whether they can make a *Feldenkrais* practice work at all.

I have often heard the argument that if your work is good enough, you will have no trouble maintaining a full practice. This troubles me because I have seen some very fine practitioners (in terms of their capability with the work) struggling, while others who seemed less developed to me had excellent practices. I feel a great deal of the problem has more to do, in fact, with positioning in the marketplace and marketing skills and personal skills which are not so specific to our particular way of working. I don't believe one necessarily needs a vast knowledge of our work to do good work either. We do need to understand what we are doing and to have a good balance of confidence, curiosity and the ability to be present with our clients/students.

Practitioner income is a common theme of concern for all of us volunteering to work in the Guild organization. We are very aware that there are some areas in which we can help practitioners, and others where at best what we can do is to help practitioners to help themselves. In the major area of getting the work

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Issues and Concerns

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known on a national level, we do have plans which will only continue to be carried out as we can make funds available.

#2. Funding for the Guild — It is true that the Guild runs on a minimal budget considering all that we are trying to do, need to do, and would like to do. Is this necessary? Is it appropriate? If the Guild had more funding, would we spend it wisely? Promoting the work and its practitioners is certainly a major part of the Guild's mission; but much of this is still up to ourselves as individual practitioners. So how much should we expect the Guild to do in this area, and how much more could the Guild do if it had more funds? On the other hand, how much longer can we expect volunteers to do so much of the work of the Guild—work that is making a real impact in the world of allied professions? To have professional management of Guild operations we will need a LOT more money. Where will this come from?

#3. Competence — This is actually two issues: One has to do with our competence to do the work, how we know that we are competent practitioners, what Guild Certification means, and what the Guild's role should be in protecting the public against incompetent or unethical practitioners.

The second competence issue is much more difficult for me to talk about, because it has to do with the competence of myself and others doing Guild work to do what we are doing. Particularly so, since how is it determined if any of us are doing a good job or not? What are the criteria? And if we are not doing a good job, who will do something about it?

Before I go further with this, I want to say that I believe many who have volunteered their time and energies to the Guild are performing above and beyond the call of duty. Also, there are no guarantees that if we hired "professionals" to do the same jobs and paid them handsomely, that

they would do better than we are—and by not understanding the work intimately as we do and not being so dedicated to it, they could well do worse. But we do need to understand the inherent problem.

When someone is elected or appointed to a volunteer position, the lines of authority are not so clear. It is not easy to "fire" a volunteer who may be very skilled in some areas, BUT NOT COMPETENT TO DO THE JOB THEY VOLUNTEERED TO DO. Sometimes the person volunteered because it was an opportunity to do something they could not do in ordinary life, and often they are dealing in an area which is not clear in their self-knowledge. Of course, generally we do not even think in terms of "firing" but in terms of bringing the person along, shifting them to a more appropriate role, etc.

The problem can become particularly acute for elected positions where there is legal responsibility, because those who nominate and elect do not necessarily have any idea of what kind of a job the person will actually do once in this position (besides, there often is not much of a choice in the voting—frequently we only have one candidate); and neither is it easy to get a clear picture after the fact, while the winner is now entrenched in a legally elected position. Processes for selection and removal of an elected or appointed Board member became a big question in 1993 and 94. The Bylaws Committee spent quite a long time thinking about the best way to provide the Guild with needed human resources without the Board becoming unable to fulfill its legal obligations or the membership losing control.

I don't mean to say that there are no solutions to all this within our current structure; clear lines of authority are possible in a volunteer,

"The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt 'til they are too strong to be broken."

Samuel Johnson

non-profit organization, but that depends on agreement, respect and good faith within the organization. Most of the time we are simply grateful for the excellent contributions each of us can make and is willing to make for the future of the Guild and the work.

#4. Conflict of Interest — This is a complicated issue, pointing to how those in the Guild hierarchy, particularly on the Training Board and Board of Directors might abuse, and can avoid abusing, their positions for financial gain. I feel we have made improvements in this area. There is a clearly stated policy for the TAB: those who serve are expected to declare any potential for gain or affiliations which might color their viewpoint. My experience is that this has a very sobering effect not only on those who are hearing that person's views, but on the speaker too. In certain situations a member must refrain from voting on an issue. If the conflict is clear enough, such as when a member is also an applicant, or the training organizer of a program being reviewed (or a program in direct conflict to the one being reviewed), that member must leave the meeting.

So far I have not seen a situation where a member had much to gain financially by being on the Guild Board of Directors. (Anyone who thinks that being on the Board is likely to be lucrative has another think coming.) Nevertheless, we still need to complete a similar conflict of interest policy for the Board, as such a situation may arise in the future.

#5. Political Orientation vs. Business Orientation — There was a big discussion last year about the choices for a potential new Guild structure. Some people described it as "democracy vs. efficiency". Many seemed to feel that if the Guild structure were set up by what is thought in the business world to be good corporate practice, there would be some loss of democratic rights of the membership.

The six BIG issues

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I have argued already in past issues of *In Touch* that this concern is misplaced. I feel this way because I have seen what a largely political orientation in our organization can do. I have been president of the Guild for nearly 5 years, and I would say that I have seen political action become necessary or useful only as a last resort and only at great anguish to all involved. Rather than disenfranchising members, good business practices based on a sound business structure is the most effective means of providing what we need. I believe a structure more heavily oriented towards a democratic process may answer a need, but it is not the one which the Guild should address, and it would ultimately leave more members in distress over how the Guild functions.

#6. Prominence of Legal and Ethical Concerns—We all knew it was

coming, but in the last two years it hit us like a hurricane. Licensing challenges in numerous states, other legal challenges from within and without, several major Ethics cases—it seems we had a lesson to learn. Well, we are learning it. The problem is, how do we retain our sense of balance?

When I came into this, so much of our approach was based on—and our business was done through—trust, good faith, personal interaction and presence, and an attempt at least to adhere to *Feldenkrais* principles in our thinking and ways of doing. We have seen that the world doesn't always work like that, and so we have shed now a good deal of our naivete about it.

However, must we forever give up that former approach? Is the answer now to do everything by rules, procedures and policies? I hope not. I think many of us have always thought of ourselves as a community first, prior to the notion of an organization. Perhaps the family system, with all its

co-dependencies and complex inter-relationships has been the better model to describe us rather than any corporate or governmental model. Most of you feel this, at least with those from your own training—feel this bond with your cohorts created by the work as well as the group.

For all its good and bad traits, a family tries to take care of its own, and that is very much the code by which many of us who have been around since the early years of the Guild have tried to live. From this time forth, that may no longer be possible in quite the same way. I hope as we go down this path and gain the skill of learning to be cunning about legal and ethical issues, as well as knowledgeable about good business practices—as we must, we do not lose the sense of care, of concern and of commonality we have in bringing a wonderful gift to the world which inspired so many of us to build this organization and define this work as a profession for the world to savor.

