

Creating a Transformative Context for Family Legacy Work

Culture, Connection & Mindfulness

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Executive Summary

- This white paper aims to explore the potential inherent in utilizing *mindfulness* and *connection* practices in conjunction with recent advances in values-based intergenerational estate and legacy planning. We have found that this holistic combination of approaches supports exceptional outcomes for families seeking to pass on sustainable legacies of wealth, well-being, and meaning.
- We propose three experiential pillars of practice: (1) understanding cultural connection challenges; (2) shared positive integrative experiences; and (3) ongoing connection practices that reinforce healthy ties.
- Although some of the background information in this paper is detailed and may sound complex, the actual experiences and exercises we recommend are simple and wholesome. We sincerely hope that simply in reading this paper, you take away something that enhances connections and opens new possibilities in relationships for you and those you love.

In the end, this work is simple. We build connection through ongoing, shared experiences and awareness. We discover the wholeness and affinity that lies at the core of who we are. And we celebrate the return to our natural, joyful state of authentic connection, together.

Background

Intergenerational Legacy Failures

- As Williams & Preisser¹ and others have noted, the failure rate of estates is high — some 70% of families suffer significant losses of wealth and/or relationships following intergenerational transitions. For families of wealth, this is what gives rise to the old saying, “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations.” The authors of this paper see the problem in somewhat more stark terms: we believe that too often, the traditional “estate planning” process is akin to leading animals to slaughter. Put simply, without the preparation of the *people* involved, the complexity, pressures, and secrecy typically surrounding estate plans is a perfect breeding ground for unmet expectations, mistrust, litigation, and the ultimate loss of financial wealth as well as life-enhancing family relationships.

Hope for Families

- In recent years, forward-looking professionals in estate planning and related fields have pioneered innovative approaches to help assure successful outcomes for families passing on intergenerational wealth and wisdom. The key distinction of this cutting-edge work is that it addresses the human and relational issues involved in legacy transfer, whereas traditional estate planning has focused more on tax and legal issues, and only addressed personal issues tangentially (e.g., through trust directives). This new work is significant, and has the potential for alleviating much unnecessary suffering.
- At their core, all relational benefits have their roots in authentic connection. We define connection broadly, as connection to self, others, community (and ultimately the world’s living systems). Authentic connection strengthens bonds and alliances, and is necessary for us to blossom and thrive as individuals and communities.
- Connection-based *facilitation* is an emerging ‘field’ led by multiple early adopters of social facilitation and connection mentoring work. Though the field is not formally established, connection-based facilitation is supported by neurobiological, sociological and psychological research. From the practitioner’s standpoint of over thirty years of collective feedback, this set of tools has proven helpful in assisting families in assuring bonds of love, safety and trust.²

¹ *Preparing Heirs*, 2010

² Darcia Narvaez, *The Neurobiology of the Development of Human Morality*:

https://www.amazon.com/Neurobiology-Development-Human-Morality-Interpersonal/dp/0393706559/ref=sr_1_1?crid=FWEXUXEFMEL0&keywords=neurobiology+and+the+development+of+human+morality&qid=1562782568&s=gateway&sprefix=the+neurobiology+of+the+develop%2Caps%2C264&sr=8-1

Intellectual Knowledge Only Part of the Answer

- As noted above, substantial progress has been made in terms of identifying and addressing key elements of successful legacy planning, greatly improving the odds for families fortunate enough to implement best practices. For example, the key potential failure points of *transparency, communication, preparation* and *consensus building* are relatively straightforward and can be addressed fairly easily in most cases by trained professional facilitators. However, these approaches can still leave a significant gap between intellectual knowledge and human application. As clearly delineated in the emerging field of behavioral finance, the ways people handle money, for example, has been shown to differ widely from so-called rational behavior.³ But even more important is the fact that people also generally struggle with relationships, and this can be especially true of families with histories of unresolved conflicts.

Culture

- One of the primary reasons we struggle with relationships is that we live as part of personal, family, vocational, professional and societal cultures inexperienced and ill-equipped to support connection well. There is a systemic prevalence of unconscious incompetence regarding the positive outcomes of healthy cultural systems throughout postmodern cultures globally. This is the legacy of socially destructive practices (including colonialism in many forms) that have resulted in a complex and layered ecology of historical trauma and a mix of socially normalized post-traumatic stress disorders. What happens when we open up and try to connect with others who are not available or skilled in responding to overtures of connection? So often we are *not* met in ways that people experience natural longings for; in fact, we are often met with reactions that cause us to withdraw in emotional pain, wondering what is wrong with ourselves. The process of trying to connect with others can become a perpetual puzzle with only partially-successful solutions. This is, essentially, a degenerative feedback loop that spirals over time to erode trust and a sense of safety, with all parties affected. There is a collective and systemic challenge rooted in the aforementioned unconscious incompetence with respect to facilitating connection effectively and consistently enough to result in regenerative personal, family and community culture. *The good news is that once we “normalize” and accept cultural dysfunction, we can begin to turn away from self-doubt, and toward accepting and comforting others in this desert of longing.* We all face similar challenges.
- It’s instructive to reflect on the manifold causes of cultural disconnection. Cultural traumas have been a prominent feature of human history, right up until and including

³ Barberis, *Richard Thaler and the Rise of Behavioral Finance (2018)*:
<http://faculty.som.yale.edu/nicholasbarberis/tt10b.pdf>

the present. Wars; shifting political, national and religious divisions; subjugation of indigenous peoples; increasing mobility; alcohol and drug abuse; neglect; changing mores and technology. The list goes on, but the result is the same: the loss of tradition, stories, meaning, connection and reliable support systems.

- Families suffer from and reflect these same afflictions of alienation and loss of reliable traditions; as part of the larger culture, they are greatly influenced by their interactions with others, such as peers, co-workers, and media. The family may bring their own dysfunction to the table (so to speak), but the cross-currents are exacerbated by the unsettled nature of the larger cultural environment.

Connection

- The human need for connection is so strong that we can become emotionally and even physically ill if these needs are not met. For example, studies show that loneliness is emotionally painful and can lead to psychiatric disorders.^{4,5} According to Norton Darcia, “The social dependence that is part of human nature resembles opiate addiction; the withdrawal of an opiate drug results in the same symptoms as separation distress: psychic pain (loneliness), crying, loss of appetite, depression, sleeplessness, and irritability or aggressiveness.”⁶
- On the opposite, positive end of the spectrum, well-connected individuals exhibit what Jon Young⁷ refers to as “The Attributes of Connection,” which are indicators of the *embodiment* of connection from *sustained* exposure to healthier and regenerative cultural practices (e.g., connection facilitation). These attributes of connection are also *regenerative* in their role-modeling impact on others who instinctively recognize and

⁴ The *Economist*/KFF findings add to a wave of recent research showing high levels of loneliness. A recent Cigna survey revealed that nearly half of Americans always or sometimes feel alone (46%) or left out (47%). Fully 54% said they always or sometimes feel that no one knows them well. Loneliness isn't just a U.S. phenomenon. In a nationwide survey released in October from the BBC, a third of Britons said that they often or very often feel lonely. Nearly half of Britons over 65 consider the television or a pet their main source of company. In Japan, there are more than half a million people under 40 who haven't left their house or interacted with anyone for at least six months. In Canada, the share of solo households is now 28%. Across the European Union, it's 34%. <https://www.cigna.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/new-cigna-study-reveals-loneliness-at-epidemic-levels-in-america>

⁵ Scientists have long known that loneliness is emotionally painful and can lead to psychiatric disorders like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and even hallucinatory delirium. But only recently have they recognized how destructive it is to the body. In 2015, researchers at UCLA discovered that social isolation triggers cellular changes that result in chronic inflammation, predisposing the lonely to serious physical conditions like heart disease, stroke, metastatic cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. One 2015 analysis, which pooled data from 70 studies following 3.4 million people over seven years, found that lonely individuals had a 26% higher risk of dying. This figure rose to 32% if they lived alone. — Forbes, May 3, 2019

⁶ Panksepp, 1998

⁷ <http://8shields.org/origins-project/ropes-of-connection/>

support the values and behaviors exhibited by connected individuals. People with these attributes are also found to be more resilient. The attributes of connection can be summarized as:

- increased and sustained happiness,
 - vitality and increasing curiosity,
 - the capacity to truly listen and hear each other (an essential ingredient in health regenerative cultures),
 - natural empathy,
 - an attitude of interdependence,
 - a desire to be truly helpful,
 - reverent gratitude for life itself,
 - increased capacity for compassion and love,
 - improved mindfulness,
 - inner peace, and
 - increased creativity.
- When we begin to ask, “What can be done to overcome this loss of connection and the pain and suffering it causes?” there is some good news as well as some challenges of scale due to the need for authentic role-modeling, training and mentoring.
 - The good news is that we can begin to re-weave the fabric and magic of connection by incorporating some simple connection practices into our lives. There are easy to learn and apply elements of connection modeling that weave naturally into our everyday routines. Enjoying meals together, sharing stories of the day, gratitude practices, and playing games together are things we’ve all done. When they’re regularly practiced with the intention of supporting increased connection, they strengthen bonds and build connection. This results in the beginning of a progression towards conscious competence in attending to personal and family culture as reflected in the increase in connection attributes.
 - Healthy connection requires modeling, so there is a need for training and mentoring in each family to restore the seeds of regenerative connection facilitation practices, thus forming a more regenerative family culture. This naturally takes time and commitment, as any training effort does. There is a need for a period of immersive training and follow up with a trained connection facilitation coach and mentor.
 - It’s almost as though healthy connection is a blessing, conferred only by an “enlightened” or blessed person or group. However, this blessed elite has only one requirement: that they, themselves, have been so blessed by others. Thus, connection has its own lineage. Thankfully, we can seek out and find such mentors and comforters at any stage of life, for individuals so blessed are naturally motivated to touch the lives of others.

Mindfulness

“Mindfulness is fundamentally relational.” — Shauna Shapiro, PhD⁸

- As scientists are discovering, our neurobiology is at the heart of connection, and mindfulness is key to unlocking its enormous potential. Authentic connection — from simple awareness to emotional regulation and expression — happens at multiple levels within us as human beings, and requires the integration and synthesis of multiple neurobiological systems. To be successful, this intricate dance requires healthy, functioning participants who are tuned in to themselves and to others. It requires *integration*.

“Defined as the linkage of differentiated components of a system, integration is viewed as the core mechanism in the cultivation of well-being. In an individual’s mind, integration involves the linkage of separate aspects of mental processes to each other, such as thought with feeling, bodily sensation with logic. In a relationship, integration entails each person’s being respected for his or her autonomy and differentiated self while at the same time being linked to others in empathic communication.”

For the brain, integration means that separated areas, with their unique functions, in the skull and throughout the body, become linked to each other through synaptic connections. These integrated linkages enable more intricate functions to emerge—such as insight, empathy, intuition, and morality. A result of integration is kindness, resilience, and health.”⁹

- What Professor Siegel and others in the emerging field of mindfulness are pointing to is profound: *mindfulness practices lead to integration, and then naturally to healthier individuals, relationships and communities.*
- But before you assume we’re talking about some woo-woo spiritual branch of meditation, let’s take a step back and look at what mindfulness is at its most basic level. Mindfulness

⁸ Shauna Shapiro, PhD, Professor, Counseling Psychology, Santa Clara University
<https://www.scu.edu/ecp/faculty/counselingfaculty/shauna-shapiro-phd/shapiro-phd.html>

⁹ Dan Siegel, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, UCLA
https://m.drdansiegel.com/about/interpersonal_neurobiology/

is simply the practice of paying attention. What does one pay attention to? One's own senses, thoughts, and feelings. But what practical use is that, you ask?

- Let's suppose you are planning to take a walk in the woods. A normal walk in the woods is at least somewhat mindful. You are paying attention to the uneven ground beneath your feet, obstacles such as branches, turns in the trail, and so on. This basic mindfulness keeps you from stumbling, from danger, and hopefully, from getting lost. Now, let's imagine what a non-mindful walk in the woods might look like. How would things go if you hiked while looking at your phone (distracted), solely from a map (relying on representation), or worse yet, your memory (outdated information)?
- Can you see what we're driving at, here? The best way to navigate any territory — be it our own needs, understanding others, or building connection — is to pay close attention to the person or thing we want to understand. Mindfulness practices, such as time in nature, help us build the critical skill of attention. And in a world of distraction and competing priorities, we need to slow down and be present for awhile with ourselves and those we want to connect with. This is the surest route to understanding ourselves, others and how we relate. Of course, the quality of the time together has a profound influence on the results.

Creating a Container

- So far, we've discussed the vital importance of authentic connection, and some of the challenges we all face, as individuals, families, and in the broader culture, in seeking it. We've touched on the emerging field of connection facilitation, which has been shown to be highly effective and regenerative.
- As stated at the outset, our proposal is to utilize *mindfulness* and *connection* practices in conjunction with recent advances in values-based intergenerational estate and legacy planning to achieve extraordinary levels of well-being, resilience and sustainability for families.
- The container, or context, for family legacy work can be just as powerful an influence on outcomes as the conversations and agreements, as it reinforces presence and mindfulness, and sets an emotional tone that can open and engage participants. Just as behavioral approaches to personal finance and economics are revolutionizing those fields¹⁰, forward-looking professionals in the estate planning field are at long last coming to grips with the human side of generational transitions and wealth transfer in the context of the family, in an attempt to achieve more satisfactory outcomes for *all* members, including “generation one.”

¹⁰ Hersh Shefrin, *Behavioralizing Finance*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1597934

- Our container, in turn, is built upon three pillars: (1) awareness/normalization, (2) shared experience, and (3) ongoing connection practices. All are catalyzed by experienced leaders who embody the attributes of connection, and are world-renowned for their facilitation skills.

Awareness/Normalization

- As discussed above, the very realization that we are not alone in our struggles to find satisfying connection in a disconnected world can be an immense relief by itself. Knowing that others suffer can set us free to bear disappointments without self-reproach or blame, and allow us to explore creative approaches to reaching out. It also makes us aware that we have work to do to build bridges of understanding, and to begin the healing work in our own lives and circles that we can all benefit from.

Shared Experience

- We could write a book on this topic, alone. In fact, one of us has.¹¹ Our model (and that of the book) is based on experiences in nature, which is the ideal setting for awakening our senses and underlying neuro-biological systems of presence and awareness. For example, families can share the wonder of bird language and behavior together, which invites a sharpening of our hearing, sight and imagination as we share in our feathered, ancient friends' daily life journeys in the larger, three dimensional world. There are opportunities to help each other develop new skills and achieve a sense of mastery, such as making fire together using primitive tools.

Ongoing Connection Practices

- But nature is just the beginning. We send families home with simple connection practices such as “Story of the Day,” “Mapping,” “Sit Spot,” “Gratitude,” and more. Some we share during our time together during a family retreat. Others await discovery in a comprehensive collection of 64 online videos that we can make available to participants. These ongoing practices help deepen family connection, naturally, over time.

Capturing Wisdom

- There is nothing “new” in this work. And that’s its fundamental beauty. It touches our ancient neurobiological makeup naturally, comfortably, deeply. In fact, it draws on practices and customs as old as civilization and culture itself. We seek to touch the

¹¹ Jon Young, et al, [Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature](#).

most basic of feelings and responses to create a deep, meaningful, and lasting experience of connection. What is new is the trauma and disconnection in modern human culture, which has left us with an epidemic of loneliness, drug addiction, alienation and rising suicide rates.

Begin With a Question

- “Why do some people enjoy great connections, while others struggle?”

Our colleague and mentor, Jon Young, has spent his life pursuing the question posed above, and asking what can be done to heal and restore connection in ourselves, in relationships, and with nature. His participation in our work has brought new insights, tools and profound access to embodied wisdom. We are also grateful to mindfulness pioneers and scientists, such as Shauna Shapiro and Dan Siegel, whose support is greatly appreciated. Finally, we’re grateful to our colleagues, associates and clients for heeding their own, internal, north stars, furthering the journey for all of us.

In the end, this work is simple. We build connection through ongoing, shared experiences and awareness. We turn threads of connection, into strings, to ropes, and then to the sturdiest of cables. We discover the wholeness and affinity that lies at the core of who we are. And we celebrate the return to our natural, joyful state of authentic connection, together.

As Jon says, “Pay attention to what you’re longing for. Other people are probably longing for it, too.”