

Beth Hedva on:

Healing the World

By Andrea Bauer, CPCC

The promise of organic leadership



Beth Hedva

“*If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?” Dr. Beth Hedva, internationally renowned psychologist and leader in the field of Transpersonal Psychology was only twelve when she first heard this question and yet its impact was profound. Jolted by the realization that nothing existed the way she thought it did, she made it her mission to ‘learn the language of consciousness.’*

From that point forward, she immersed herself in the study of symbols, including tarot, palmistry, intuition development, mythology, spiritual systems, and the psychic sciences. In 1972, at age 16, she led her first workshop on the Psychic Sciences at a Habonim summer camp — to an overwhelmingly positive response from her fellow campers.

At 17, she decided to make a career out of her hobby, and by age 24, having pioneered the first ever accredited Masters program of its kind in Transpersonal Psychology concurrent to pursuing a Masters in Clinical Psychology at JFK University, she was asked to join the faculty at JFK. By the time she reached the age of 36, she had been honored as International Woman of the Year in Cambridge (England) and listed in the World’s Who’s Who of Women. These are just a few of the many accomplishments that Dr. Beth Hedva, now 51, has achieved throughout her life and career.

Despite her international reach and renown (she recently spoke at the United Nations) and a full schedule of counseling, advising, consulting, training, writing, and active participation on the boards of four local, national, and international organi-

zations, Dr. Hedva — who now lives in Calgary, Alberta in Canada — remains an extremely approachable leader. With this edition’s theme comparing therapy to coaching in mind, I met with Dr. Hedva to learn more about her work and to look at leadership development and the distinction between coaching, counseling psychology and clinical psychology through the eyes of an accomplished therapist.

AB: Before we get to the topic of leadership development, tell us what you see the overall purpose or mission of your work to be.

BH: The primary focus or purpose of my work is to be of service through teaching, consulting, and healing work as a therapist, in support of the spiritual evolution of social consciousness. My aspirational statement, which may take a lifetime to achieve, is to fully embody my role as a spiritual teacher working as a pre-eminent Canadian psychologist and humanitarian. Sharing ancient and contemporary cross-cultural spiritual teachings is my passion. Being a pre-eminent Canadian psychologist is just my own personal ambition. I’ve always had an aspiration for excellence.

Dr. Hedva believes strongly in bringing forth leadership in children at an early age. This starts by supporting and acknowledging a child’s inner leader when they are very young, helping them build confidence in their inner sense of direction, and finding means and methods to give youth opportunities to lead so

that by the time they are adults, leading is natural and they have the confidence to fulfill their mission.

The organic flow of supporting and being supported by others while leading by example aptly describes Dr. Hedva's own growth and evolution as a leader and the way she approaches her work today.

AB: Tell us about the leadership development work that you do.

BH: The work that I did for tsunami recovery was all about leadership. The Indonesian Psychology Association was overwhelmed by the devastation and loss of over 170,000 lives in Bhandar Aceh, and they asked me to create a spiritually integrated cross-cultural counseling approach

own field. Since I am Chair of Continuing Education for the International Council of Psychologists, I have an opportunity to meet and study with leaders in psychology throughout the world. I think the key to leadership for me is about this quest for continued refinement of my skill sets in those areas that are of greatest passion and interest to me. And then, of course, having the wonderful opportunity of getting to meet and study with individuals who can take me to my next level.

AB: What's the greatest challenge for you when it comes to stepping into this work?

BH: That's a good question. I'd say the greatest challenge is to stay connected with my own center and do self

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for the region. I trained social workers, psychologists, volunteers, teachers and recovery workers — all survivors who had taken on the role of leadership — to support and respond to the needs of other survivors. A large part of the training was group facilitation, group leadership skills and trauma recovery skills. In my field, whenever I'm doing group work, it's about each of us taking on the role of leading by example. Even in the back of my book *Betrayal, Trust, and Forgiveness* (Ten Speed Press, 2001) I have an appendix outlining how a person can lead a group using the book if they wish to. Ultimately, I believe that every single human being is a potential leader in the community.

AB: How do you grow and develop yourself as a leader? Do you do so purposefully or are you more organic about it?

BH: I am a lifelong learner and I'm always reading and taking courses. The primary courses that really attract me are about my own inner development and connecting with that deep quiet place within me — that is where my leadership and guidance come from. So for example, I studied for a couple of weeks with the Dalai Lama at a Kalachakra training. I also receive tremendous training, teaching and guidance in my dreams, which I realize is a little unconventional.

I'm also committed to continuing education in my

care/self ecology first. That's my mantra, self care first. It's easy when one gets involved with something that one is passionate about — it doesn't matter if it's about humanity or about inventing a new technology or the cure for cancer — to lose ourselves in this external focus.

AB: What's the con of getting lost in the passion and not taking care of yourself first?

BH: No matter how lofty our ideals, how inspired we are, and how able we are to tap that infinite potential within our being, we also happen to live in very finite physical bodies. So in order to fulfill my personal mission — which is to fully embody my spirit— I need to stay connected with my body's needs.

AB: Isn't self care important for all leaders to attend to?

BH: Yes. The need for harmony and balance in life, at a personal level, is core. When we are out of balance at the most fundamental level, our world is out of balance. If the leaders in our world are not attending to self care — to those personal elements that bring them back to balance — whether it's family time, intimate time with their partner, intimate time with themselves in rejuvenation and personal renewal, they are not able to honor and respect the need for that in our world. And our world is out of balance and harmony right

now, in our relationship to the environment, in our relationship to respecting all life forms, in relationship to respecting all cultures. So it's essential for Western and European culture to awaken to the necessity of living life in harmony and in balance, starting with the leaders of our Western world.

We next turned our attention to the differences between coaching and therapy, and coaching's impact on psychology. According to Dr. Hedva, the fields of clinical psychology, counseling psychology and coaching are defined and distinguished as follows.

***Clinical psychology** focuses on the evaluation and assessment of psychological health or pathology from a physiological, cognitive and emotional perspective. The therapeutic relationship is one in which a detached, expert observer, the clinician, helps clients recognize their psychological and behavioral problems and learn how to manage their concerns to better cope with life.*

*While trained to recognize and diagnose psychopathology, instead of focusing on how to correct or manage what is wrong, **counseling psychology** often looks more at how 'normal' or healthy people function. The focus is more on how to identify personal strengths, cultivate potential and foster growth both interpersonally and intrapsychically. For both clinical and counseling psychology, the therapeutic relationship is usually key to healing. This means exploring 'transference and counter-transference,' i.e., blocks in the therapeutic relationship, to help clients recognize what works and what doesn't work in other important relationships, and to make new choices.*

***Life coaches**, as Dr. Hedva understands it, are not trained in psychopathology, nor does the coaching relationship emphasize transference and counter-transference as a therapeutic tool. The life coach is more of a personal strategist who might share experiences, insights and tried and true methods that have worked for others (including themselves) to tackle life's challenges. So, goals and results are emphasized over process or insights into the therapeutic relationship.*

AB: What impact are you seeing the growth of the coaching profession having on psychologists?

BH: I think that depends on who you speak to. I'm not a very competitive person. I have a very rare belief — that I don't think is really so rare — that there is enough work for everybody, and that each person who is born has a particular place to fulfill in the world.

Whether you are called psychologist, or coach, or social worker, or marriage and family therapist, there is a place for you.

Some people who may struggle with the question of whether they are going to be able to get enough clients for example, may want to define the turf more, and may want to draw lines in the sand. I think that's true among all of the professions. They do so with the intention of wanting to be and do good for the public. But sometimes those lines get blurred when regulatory bodies come in to protect titles in order to define what those lines are. Then there is the necessity to qualify to use a title or technique, or conform to standards that take us away from that initial mission of "Who do I serve?" and "How am I here to serve?"

AB: What similarities do you see between the professions?

BH: One of the things that I've noticed about coaching is that it is becoming highly regulated. There was a time when it was not regulated. The same is true in marriage and family therapy, in social work, and psychology. This belief that if we have enough rules that are defining what titles belongs to which style of practice, territory, or professional turf — that that will solve the problem — is erroneous in my opinion.

What solves the problem is people recognizing their areas of competence and incompetence, personally

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and professionally. If they come up against a problem beyond their area of expertise, to either refer the client or gain the expertise so they can be of appropriate service. It has nothing to do with regulation, and everything to do with integrity and ethics. If regulation solved the problem, then there would be fewer disciplinary actions and lawsuits. But we, as a society, aren't in a position to change our primary social systems and institutional structures yet. In the meantime, regulations are becoming top heavy and the

professions are often serving themselves instead of serving the public, in my opinion.

Dr. Hedva says that it won't be until Generation Y reaches its fifties and is in full power that we will be in a position to change our institutional social systems. In the work that she does around generational differences, she teaches that every generation has a unique purpose. By combining conventional social psychology and demographics with an intuitive twist, based on her long time experience with astrology and other ancient intuitive systems, Dr. Hedva identifies three universal challenges that define each generation's purpose and contribution to society. The universal challenges are: 1) to change with the times, 2) to leave a legacy for future generations, and 3) to fix the mistakes or problems left by others, in spite of the previous generation's best efforts and intentions.

So before Generation Y can change our social systems and institutions, Generation X must fulfill its generational purpose. This, according to Dr. Hedva, is to transform the workplace from the

current corporate model, which isn't really working, to one in which the way we do business in the world is an integrated balance between personal life, professional life, health and well-being, and community life. It's only after this is in place that the Gen Yers can fulfill their mission, which is to rebuild our social systems by identifying those current institutional systems that aren't working (health care, education, legal systems, for example), and to restructure and reformulate the basic societal building blocks of our time.

Because she's just a little further ahead, and maybe because she's been mentoring and leading by example in a chain of leaders since she was 12 years old, Dr. Hedva sees herself as giving permission to Generation X to do what it is that they are here to do. With a little luck, and if it's her destiny to do so, she hopes that she'll have the same opportunity to work with Generation Y as well. Given the humanitarian direction she's headed, I hope so too. •

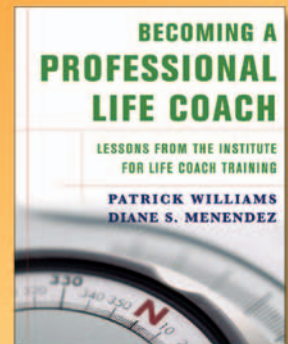
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