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Leadership

in Ministry

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Whether through cue cards, choruses, or memories, the voices of our past remain with us. Author and consultant Bob Dale shares insights from his family of origin work.

The “Cue Card” Chorus

Bob Dale

Do you ever hear yourself saying something so automatically that you wonder where it came from? These recent, longer stays in Missouri have helped me identify the voices and clarify the messages I've heard in my head for a long time. I'm talking about those familiar pieces of advice or guidance that seem to come out of nowhere and appear almost like cue cards before

my eyes. I've sorted out the identities and the messages better now.

I grew up in a stable, three-generation family with 2 parents and 5 grandparents—both sets of my parents' parents plus a great-grandparent. Each of them influenced me...all in different ways and some more directly than others. On average, these folks lived to 90+, so they had time and opportunity to shape me in ways I didn't have eyes



The “Cue Card” Chorus, cont’d

Dr. Bob Dale is the author of more than twenty books related to congregational leadership. Recently retired after 18 years with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board as assistant executive director, where he also directed the Young Leader’s Program. Dale currently writes and practices leadership coaching.

to see at the time. Now, I’ve put faces on the “cue card chorus” who show up over and over again in my thinking. Here’s the cast for and the lines of my internal drama.

“Stay Free!”—Great-grandma Griggs.

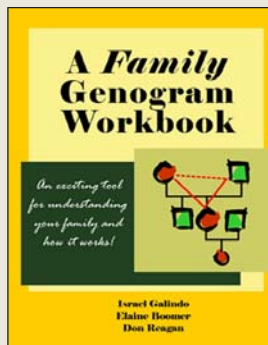
By the time I knew her, Great-grandma Griggs was a little white-haired wisp of a woman, silently moving on the fringe of my Grandma Dale’s household before her death at 99. She was related to Jesse James, had married, had two daughters, was widowed, and then remarried. She found the second husband unworthy. In a supreme act of freedom for the era, she ran him off with a 54.40 rifle usually reserved for buffalo hunting. He got the hint and stayed gone, so Great-grandma raised her children alone. I still hear her advice clearly...even without the artillery.

“Be Curious!”—Grandma Dale.

My Grandma Dale had only a grade school education, but she loved to read. She was the first person I knew who had a magazine subscription. It was to Life magazine, a large weekly with beautiful photography. She loved national politics and lived in a bigger world than most Ozark women. I wrote her a letter on her 100th birthday to thank her for giving me the gift of curiosity. Because of her, I’ve “read the world.”

“Heal Your Heart.”—Grandpa Dale.

I only remember one afternoon with my Grandpa Dale...a time when one of his old friends called him, “Red.” That struck me as funny...since he was as bald as a billiard ball. Grandpa died at 76 from complications of diabetes, the youngest death of any of my elders. I suspect he also died of a heart broken by a great grief. His oldest surviving son, Loren, the golden child and the bearer of the family birthright, died in 1945 in the sinking of the Navy’s USS Asheville in the South China Sea. Loren’s



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The “Cue Card” Chorus, cont’d

body was never recovered. Every time Grandpa heard Loren’s name mentioned, he’d burst into sobs. I don’t think he was able to take his own advice. But, I still remember the tears and try to heed the hope.

“Go to School!”—Dad

The Great Depression interrupted my Dad’s high school education for 1/3 century. He wanted his three sons to get educations, and we all did. When he went into WWII, we sold our herd of dairy cows, except for two heifers, one to produce a herd to send me to college and another to pay tuition for my infant brother, Jim. Dad expected me to have perfect grade cards. The only public office my Dad ever held was as president of the local school board. I knew I was destined to leave the mountains for the university and “go to school.”

“Maintain Your Independence!”—Mom

My Mother was a second first-born in her family, born 7 years after her two brothers and given lots of support in life. She went to a boarding high school in Western Kansas and later took charge in our household and in every job she ever had. She was devoted to Dad, but she always kept her own mind and sense of direction. As she approaches 91, she still lives alone and still drives. It’s no surprise to me that I want to call the shots in my life too.

“Life Is Play!”—Grandpa Kingry.

Mom, Jim, and I lived with Grandpa and Grandma Kingry at Avila, MO while Dad was in the Army. Grandpa was endlessly fascinating to a preschooler. He let me shadow him as he did chores and ran his farm. He’d been a real cowboy when he first came west from Rocky Mount, VA, and

The “Cue Card” Chorus, cont’d

Read a review of Bob Dale’s latest book, *Cultivating Perennial Churches: Your Guide to Long-Term Growth* (Chalice Press, 2008), by LIM faculty member Betty Pugh Mills on p. 8.

so he taught me to rope...weeds. We played catch, and I enjoyed his banjo playing. It was many years before I realized he was 62 when I was four. Grandpa had homesteaded in southwestern Kansas, built up a successful wheat farming business, and then lost it all in the Dust Bowl. He was lucky to sell everything he owned to the bank for \$1000, moving to MO to start over at 57. His optimism and sense of fun remain in my psyche to this day.

“Read the Bible.”—Grandma Kingry

Grandma was a no-nonsense, take-no-prisoners’ Midwestern woman. One basic feature of her lifestyle was church. I remember her teaching the adult Bible class in the little Blake Baptist Church. I doubt that any of the deacons had the nerve to question her on biblical interpretation. When I was in seminary, I told her I was studying Greek in order to read the New Testament in its original language. She informed me that, if the King James Bible was good enough for Paul, it should be good enough for me! That was a no-win argument, so I just said, “Yes, Ma’am.”

The messages from these elders still inform me...and have mostly flown under the radar until recently. I do recognize some key legacies:

I’ve been molded by strong women...and still prefer them.

I’ve noticed that grudges and hurts have a long shelf life.

I’ve been lucky to have elders, family and beyond, who cared enough to invest in me over time.

Mostly, I’m convinced that everyone should have a “cue card chorus” to help them find their next line in the drama. ♦

An “Anti-Cult”

Elizabeth Norton



Elizabeth Norton has been the Director of Music at First Parish in Concord, MA for 15 years. She has been a participant in the New England Leadership in Ministry Workshop since 2002. Website: www.firstparish.org.

During my first Leadership in Ministry workshop, it occurred to me that this group might be a cult. What was this obscure vocabulary everyone was using? How much influence did this leader and his staff have over the participants? What would I be giving up to join this group? Of course, this was my own new-comer anxiety talking. Like many leaders, I prefer to feel competent!

Reflecting back now on this first encounter with Bowen theory, and better versed in that obscure vocabulary, I suggest that Leadership in Ministry might be considered an “anti-cult.” Far from asking us to give up our individuality, LIM urges participants to work on self-differentiation. Rather than cutting off ties with our families, we are encouraged to explore and connect with our family of origin. And though the theory is complex, it is based in solid science. Rather than accepting dogma, we are encouraged to consider the interpretations and applications of the theory within our own family systems, our congregations and the wider society.

Though I have been studying Bowen theory for seven years, I still feel like a novice. But I know I have developed a new lens for viewing my family of origin, my congregational system and the many other communities of which I am a part.

Recently, I recognized a new habit: When faced with conflict I often find myself wondering, “How would I present this to my Leadership in Ministry group?” Immediately I am calmer. The Bowen lens falls into place. I can step back, get some perspective and think more clearly.

I am grateful for the guidance the theory and its practitioners give me on a daily basis. I am proud to be a member of the “anti-cult.” ♦

Review of *Becoming Your Best*

LIM faculty member Bill Pyle reviews Ron Richardson's recently released book.

Bill Pyle

I doubt that I am the best person to review a Ron Richardson book. I do not make any claim to being an objective reviewer. When I first read *Creating a Healthier Church*, I was intrigued with his perceptiveness of human dynamics and his ability to illustrate those dynamics through examples drawn from his work with congregations and his clinical practice of marriage and family therapy. Since that time, I buy his books without giving it a second thought.

In his latest book, Richardson focuses on emotional maturity. Emotional maturity is presented as the essential basis for building solid character, which includes becoming a person of principle. While all of Richardson's books use the

insights he gained from Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), *Becoming Your Best* focuses on 'differentiation of self' as a key concept for developing emotional maturity. He

draws on his experiences in his own family, the experiences of clients

in his clinical practice, and experiences from the characters found in the novels of Jane Austen. Richardson is an Austen enthusiast and uses her characters to demonstrate how character and emotional maturity develop over time. Her heroes, like us, are set in families and communities where they struggle to become better people. They are attempting to become emotionally mature human beings.

Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming Your Best: A Self-help Guide for Thinking People*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2008.

Richardson seems to be especially attentive to the ways Austen's characters stay connected to those who are important to them without sacrificing self or their values.

Richardson's examples from his own family and his clients' families are particularly helpful. They illustrated the way character develops over time. They demonstrated strategies for overcoming the sabotage that often accompanies efforts at differentiation of self. Throughout the book, Richardson provides 'opportunities for reflection,' by asking the reader personal questions that facilitates personal application. His goal is not just clearer thinking about char-



acter and emotional maturity, he wants to spur the reader toward growth and implementation.

This is a fascinating exploration of how we develop emotional maturity. It expands the discussion of 'differentiation of self' to include the issue of character. For Richardson, "Virtue is about living one's life by principle and implementing those principles in our everyday relationship, even when we do not 'feel' like it." Being clear about one's principles and then working to live by them on a consistent basis is a key to emotional maturity. This inclusion of character in the discussion of differentiation of self may be the lasting contribution of this book to BFST. ♦

Midwife for a subtle paradigm shift

Mary Jane Ott



Mary Jane Ott,
MN, MA, APRN, BC, RYT
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in
Boston

As a nurse practitioner, I provide clinical services and education in integrative therapies to patients, families and staff to support healing and maximize coping skills as they face life threatening illness and sometimes death. I am often “called in” to consult around pain and symptom management issues. My particular areas of expertise include the relaxation response, imagery and visualization, mindfulness meditation, yoga, reiki and therapeutic touch. Though not ordained, this is the ministry to which I am called.

My husband Stephen introduced me to the Leadership in Ministry Workshops. Being licensed as a nurse practitioner and a psychotherapist, I have a long time interest in systems and over the years have found Bowen Family Systems theory of particular interest. I attended my first workshop in 2006 and have returned annually. My motivation for returning was to better understand the emotional process of my family of origin and how it relates to my experience of and function in my family as well as at work and in the world at large.

I find the LIM workshops refreshing, life giving, transformative and at times difficult and challenging. Those are the times when it’s helpful to step back understanding the process as a learning opportunity or as Larry suggests a “research project.” For me, it’s the lived experience of “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” Unlike previous experiences of learning Bowen Family Systems in academic and clinical settings (which included much study, investigation, writing papers, clinical practice, supervision and reflection), the LIM workshops have served as the midwife for a subtle paradigm shift that opens the door to a liberating way of experiencing and being in the world. Of course, each time I think, “Ah, I get it!” the system smiles and says, “Ah, but there’s more; look over here.” And so, I keep coming back. ♦



Betty Pugh Mills

If there is a subject area of books written for clergy that usually end up making “persons of the cloth” all feel inadequate and beyond the task, it is in the area of “church growth.” But Bob Dale’s most recent book, *Cultivating Perennial Churches: Your Guide to Long-Term Growth*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 2008, might actually invite pastors and church leaders to gain some confidence in addressing church growth and development by going at it from a purely “organic” angle. Yes, Bob Dale, brings to the reader an opportunity to apply the best of the plant world’s perennial language of gardening, but sets the metaphor in the context of church growth and organizational development. The interests of his approach are in helping the pastor and church leadership understand that church growth which is for the long term is about investing in the church’s

Another book on Church Growth?

LIM faculty member Betty Pugh Mills reviews Bob Dale’s latest book, Cultivating Perennial Churches: Your Guide to Long-term Growth

identity, in its mission, and doing so with consistency over time so that growth will happen from season to season.

The table of contents organizes well the approach as Dale introduces the concepts of looking at long-term growth, what makes churches distinct and unique using this kind of approach, and then a chapter on seven different congregations with attempts to give evidence of these distinctive characteristics. Each church is different in terms of size, functional ethos, history, and flavor, which is a very positive aspect of the book for this reader, because churches are never based on a standard, cookie-cutter model and how we go about leading change and organizational development will also reflect the nature and particularities of each congregation. He closes out the book with a concluding summary of what leadership looks like if they want to nurture churches for long-term growth, for the long haul, and for large chunks of time where the

church sees multiple evidences of vitality and life in its worship, education, mission, and morale as a community.

I’ve known Bob Dale for over 22 years and continue to find his work relevant, engaging, and helpful for the everyday pastor, of which I am one. I also find that he takes times in communicating well his ideas and supporting his theological presuppositions with good biblical and theological foundations. The book was easy to read, coherent, with clear concepts and lots of originality. I even used some of the material I found especially in chapter nine for a recent Church Council Retreat as I invited my own leaders to ask whether or not our congregation is planning our growth to be perennial or not? I know that I may be very biased as I look at my congregation, but taking Dale’s approach and assessing where we are and where we want to go was both enjoyable and meaningful as we reflected upon what it takes to maintain church vitality over long periods of time. I also felt



2010 Workshops:

MID-ATLANTIC
Lost River, WV

Workshop A Sessions

March 22—24
October 25—7

Workshop B Sessions

April 19—21
September 13—15

NORTHEAST, Newton, MA

May 17—19
October 11—13

WESTERN
Colorado Springs, CO

May 3—5
September 27—29

See our web site for registration information and updates. Call us for current space availability at these workshops.



Click here for a
registration form

Dale book review, cont'd

very hopeful for my own setting that we were talking about church health, congregational vision, and identity more than numbers of new members, baptisms, and converts.

It seems to me that being a Master Gardener is about understanding the many variables that help a plant to become stronger, more vibrant, and to spread beyond its original organic beginnings but still reflect its DNA in new and exciting ways. Dale is reminding us that it is no different with churches and planting thoughtfully, feeding well and nurturing the life around you, and doing it with some consistency over time makes for all kinds of growth, even numerical, but not limited to it. ♦

Message from the Coordinator, cont'd from back page

leader or quick fixes for problems. They can help us understand that our growth as leaders involves our personal growth and most 'problems' are symptoms of more basic systemic issues that cannot be solved by quick fixes. This is why you will meet participants who have been involved in the workshops for a number of years. We have one workshop regular who was present for the first session in 1991!

Bowen Theory's teaching about emotional process and self-differentiation and Ed Friedman's teaching about 'leadership through self-differentiation' are the stack pole concepts around which revolves everything we do. Many workshop registrants had never thought of leadership in terms of emotional process and self-differentiation, much less understood the concepts. Some of this thinking might seem strange at first, but it begins to make sense and prove quite helpful as one hangs in and works with it.

Remember that this will be your first session of a two session workshop. Each session builds upon the previous one. Let me reassure you that you will not be judged (or graded) by anyone on the basis of how complete your genogram is, how well you performed in any of your case studies, how many books you have read or how well you understand Bowen Theory. The workshops are about learning together. Bring your questions, needs and dreams for developing your leadership. ♦

A Ten-year Workshop “Veteran” Reflects on her LIM Experience

Rebecca Maccini is one of the many workshop “veterans” committed to growth in life and ministry through continuing education in the LIM workshops



Rebecca Werner Maccini

The first time I ever heard of Larry Matthews was when I heard his voice on a cassette tape. Larry had led a workshop on church renewal for American Baptist pastors in the spring of 1996 or 1997, and my husband brought me an audiotape of the workshop. I was intrigued by the idea of leadership that he presented and the concepts of individual/togetherness forces and anxiety that are at the heart of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST). He introduced me to the emotional triangle as the way to ‘see’ what goes on in the emotional process, comparing it to putting a hat and clothes on the invisible man. When Larry first

came to New England to introduce the Leadership in Ministry Workshops, I signed up. Since that first New England workshop in the spring of 1999, I have been very engaged in studying BFST. I have studied at the Center for Family Process in Bethesda, MD, attended an annual symposium held by the Georgetown Family Center and participated in many workshops at the Vermont Center for Family Studies and a couple at the New England Seminar on Bowen Studies.

I confess that I have been overzealous in my goal to study the con-

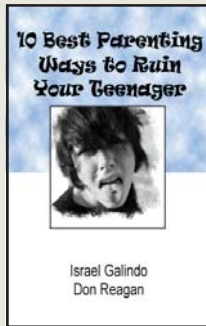
cepts of Bowen Theory. This has been out of my own anxiety and my hope that Bowen theory would

“Every day the word of the day in my house was anxiety, which was exactly what I wanted to be saved from.”

be a ‘salvation system’. Since June, 2000, I have been an adoptive mom to three Russian sisters who are now in their later teens. My daughters were pulled out of their family of origin and immersed into my family and a totally unfamiliar culture, context, and language. Every day the word of the day in my house was anxiety, which was exactly what I wanted to be saved from. Family systems thinking did provide me

with some language and concepts to help me understand what was happening in my family, but I have nuanced my ideas about the value of Bowen theory as a salvation system.

As I attended the Leadership In Ministry workshops, I began to realize that I was using, or misusing, the concepts of BFST to divide the world into those who knew and understood Bowen theory and those who did not. I became very clear about those who got it and those who didn’t. I had my own personal court and I was the judge. Those who didn’t ‘get’ the concepts of triangles, reactivity, and chronic anxiety were sentenced to a



10 Best Parenting Ways to Ruin Your Teenager, Israel Galindo and Don Reagan; and *10 Best Parenting Ways to Ruin Your Child*, by Israel Galindo.

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A Ten-year veteran, cont'd

lesser status; they were not worthy. In some crazy way, that relieved some anxious feelings in me in the short-term. However, that perspective was not a long-term solution to my anxiety and it also did not offer salvation. I came to see that it was only my personal anxiety-binder that I needed to examine and understand.

Now, ten years later, I attend the Leadership in Ministry Workshops with a spirit of humility. Increasingly I use my time in my small group to look at my own functioning in the group, to reflect on the times when my anxiety rises as I make my presentations and to observe how I relate or do not relate as creatively as I would like to other members of the group. I pay attention to how my body reacts when someone else presents. When I feel my heart pumping stronger or feel a surge of anger within me, I recognize that something about their story is causing a reactive or more anxious state within me, and I try to learn from that.

After studying fairly intensely for ten years, I am becoming known in the local conference of my denomination as someone who is a lay 'expert' in family systems. I do not feel like an expert. I think I see some of the emotional process going on in my congregation and in me; and I certainly work on being clear about my roles, tasks and responsibilities as a pastor. I also believe that family systems thinking has enhanced my preaching because it is more authentic. However, I still feel like a novice in BFST. I do continue to find the concepts fascinating and I love talking about them and sharing them with others. I plan to continue working on my own functioning through this kind of thinking because I believe there is a lot of truth in it. Last fall I was asked to lead a clergy support group in a United Church of Christ association and I was asked to do a presentation at a symposium at the Vermont Center for Family Studies on ways Bowen theory can be useful for clergy.

I believe I will continue to attend the LIM workshops, even though in the past year I have hit a dead end in my personal family of origin work. Hmmm, how curious. I wonder what that is all about. ♦

The Reverend Rebecca Werner Maccini is Pastor of Congregational Church of Henniker, Henniker NH. She is a member of the Newton, MA LIM workshop since 1999.

Leadership In Ministry Scholarships

"I want to thank you for the LIM workshops. They have been extremely helpful to me. I am still learning so much. This is an important ministry that you are providing and what a bargain."

A note accompanying the registration of a returning 'veteran'

"I suppose Bowen theory would say we should not be surprised when an anxious system reacts by deciding to remove support for their leaders' efforts at becoming less anxious!" Those were words of insight from a first time workshop registrant informing us that his continuing education funds were cut for the following year.

It is no surprise that the present recession has increased requests for scholarship help. Almost one-third of our 2008 registrants were unable to register for the 2009 workshops, most of them due to budget cuts that removed or cut continuing education funds and, in two cases, to job loss. We are grateful that the registration of 19 new persons enabled us to offer viable workshops in all three locations. However, we may very well face a similar situation in 2010.

Although we do not have an official LIM Scholarship Fund, we have announced in past newsletters that we will gladly receive contributions for this purpose. A few such gifts through the years have enabled us to provide some partial scholarships. This year the congregation of one of our registrants contributed funds that made it possible for another registrant to attend.

We welcome gifts from individuals as well as congregations. Make checks payable to "Lawrence Matthews, LIM Workshops" and note on the check or in an accompanying letter: "LIM Scholarship Fund."

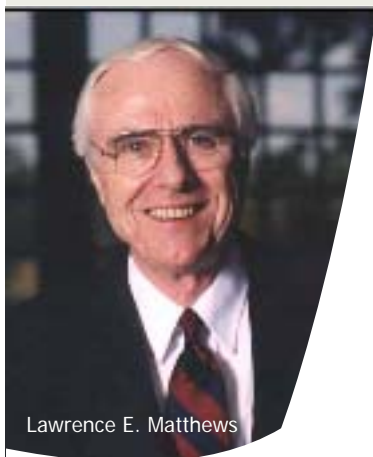
Thank you for helping us to continue to offer LIM workshops for a 20th year.

LIM Faculty Blogs

Leadership In Ministry faculty member Margaret Marcuson, and newsletter editor Israel Galindo contribute regularly to blogs that deal with leadership and Bowen Family Systems Theory. Check out their blogs at the links below:

Marcuson Leadership Circle blog: www.margaretmarcuson.com/blog

GRACE Writes blog: www.GRACE-ed.org/blog ♦



Lawrence E. Matthews

A Message from the LIM Coordinator

LIM Coordinator Larry Matthews introduces the Leadership in Ministry Workshop experience to prospective participants.

I receive many questions from potential workshop participants, the most frequent being, “What is the workshop all about?” “What do I need to prepare for?” and “What is the format like?” Below is my typical response:

I think what is essential to understand is that our workshops are available as a **RESOURCE** for you in your development as a leader and as you help others do the same. They are about *your* process of growth as a person, leader and a teacher of leaders.

Most of your time will be spent in your small peer group under the leadership of a faculty coach. The focus will be upon your family of origin work and your case studies. I understand your anxiety about genograms, but family of origin work is an important

part of the workshop experience. You will learn how to use your genogram work as a guide and aid in understanding how our

families shape our lives. Your faculty coach will begin with you wherever you are and help you construct your basic genogram step by step. Some members of your group will have been participants for years, but remember that nobody in any workshop has become a 'fully differentiated person' or 'mastered this way of leading' – both are life-long processes and not 'places of arrival'. Veterans encourage first timers and first timers ask those important questions everyone, regardless of their experience, needs to keep asking. For your case study

presentation, remember that sharing where you are 'stuck' rather than 'a success story' will be most beneficial for you. Reflection upon your cases within the group will provide windows through which you can better understand your functioning as a person and a leader.

During the large group presentations by faculty and guest presenters, the basics of Bowen Family Systems Theory are taught and applied to practical leadership situations. The books on our reading list and the videos shown during the workshops are additional resources, as are the interactions with other participants in the retreat center setting.

The workshops do not offer techniques for becoming a successful

person and a leader.

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