

LEARNINGS #18

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I can get support from many sources

As you may have noticed, Learnings has been away for quite a while – two and a half years, in fact. Shortly after I completed the previous issue, I discovered that I had RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury). I could tell you far more about RSI than you want to know, but the basic point is that I could not use my hands and arms. After seven weeks in hospital I began a slow recovery which is still continuing.

I have started this newsletter several times over the past two years. I have been slowed down by the pain of typing, but also by the difficulty of figuring out what I have learned. I certainly do not want to go through all this pain and frustration without learning something!

As a trainer and consultant, I am so accustomed to giving support that I sometimes forget. how to receive support. Like many people in the helping professions, I am still convinced that it is more blessed to give than to receive. However, I try to remember that wonderful cartoon in which the mother tells the child to be nice to other people because “that is what we are here for.” The child then asks, “What are the other people here for?” Well, I have learned that the other people are here to be nice to us.

About twenty years ago I began developing some ideas about giving and getting support. I was preparing to make a major change in my life and needed some support. One of the things I did was to distinguish five different sources of support. I thought then that each source was appropriate for different situations. That is sometimes true. But my learning from RSI is that in a crisis I need all five sources. And all five sources came through.

The five sources of support are my support network, my support system, my support group, my support team, and my support partner. Some people use these terms interchangeably so I have given them my own specific definitions.

My support network is everyone in the known universe. Even though there are quite a few billion people around, there is a theory that I am never more than five people away from anyone else. In other words, I probably know someone who knows someone That worked with my RSI. After more than a month of “tests” that terrified me because no one seemed to know anything, Anne mentioned my situation to her friend Pamela. Pamela remembered seeing an article about the RSI Association. Someone there provided the phone number of a man with RSI. He listened to me with great understanding and gave me the name of the leading specialist. Within a few days I was in hospital.

My support system is everyone I know. For most of us, that is hundreds or even thousands of people. Many of you sent good wishes for my recovery and that has helped a great deal.

My support group is the people that I spend time with. These are the people who help me get through life day by day. We don't have any task or objective; we just like to be with each other. Shelagh organises a picnic at Hampton Court; Anne gets theatre tickets; Peter rings in to chat.

My support team is the people who work with me on a specific task. My support team for recovering from RSI includes doctors, nurses, and therapists. It also includes my colleagues who have kept Castle going. Two other support teams became part of my RSI support team. When Tom asked me to design a course specifically for his company, he and my colleagues who worked with me on the design became a support team. Working on that design reassured me that I could do creative work in spite of RSI. Another support team was the Class of 66. Working to raise money for our class gift to the College of Wooster kept me from worrying about RSI.

My support partner is a person who can provide lots of support and lots of different kinds of support. My primary support partner is Anne, but my RSI almost wore her out. Fortunately, we each have other support partners. Marianne, my support partner for more than 20 years, gave me a special book and challenged me to be myself. Geof, my support partner for more than 5 years, listened patiently to my endless rambling. Jenny, my support partner for almost 10 years, wished me "not a speedy recovery but a transforming one".

That has been my theme for the past two years. The transformation is still going on but I have learned a few things. I will share some more of them in the next newsletter – which should be out in less than two years!

LEARNING: There are many sources of support and in a crisis I need them all.