



26 April 2010

Dear Coordinators,

This letter to you comes out of our recent Focusing Institute Board retreat, where we came to an agreement that TFI is in a transitional organization phase, where we have both the need and the opportunity to create new forms of organization. As a Board, we addressed how we want to be moving forward in different areas. We will post the Board's retreat minutes on these areas on TFI's website, and put a notice on this list with a link to the minutes as soon as they are available. Our intent here is to share with you in detail one of these steps for moving forward, a proposal for creating what we are calling "Functional Committees." We want to broaden participation in TFI to help us move forward in critical areas, beyond what the Board and Staff alone are able to accomplish.

In one way, this is a continuation and expansion of our long-standing approach of working in partnership with the larger Focusing community. TFI is a very small organization. Our staff consists of Mary Hendricks and Melinda Darer, along with a part-time support person, Elizabeth Cantor. We also pay Gene Gendlin on a part-time basis for "doing what he always does." Our office consists of two rooms in Melinda's house. Yet despite our small size, we have managed to effectively spread Focusing because our organizational model has been to function as a network builder, supporting and encouraging others to create projects, and serving as a resource for materials and training.

At the same time, what is "new" here is that we want to support and encourage the formation of long-term project teams or "Functional Committees" that will have a closer and more explicit participation in the internal workings of TFI. We also see these committees as "breaking new ground" with regard to what it means to participate in a Felt-Sensing process as a group.

Context for Letter:

We are aware that there has been a long-standing concern among Coordinators of having little say in the functioning of TFI. In response, we have been looking for ways to involve more people in the work that we do. One recent instance began with an idea from members for an intermediate Focusing Award. TFI Board members invited interested people into a functional whole to create this award. In another instance, one of our Board members created a functional whole to plan and carry out the recent highly successful FOT conference. We are especially happy that these groups have been characterized by a sense of pleasure and creative accomplishment in their work together.

Currently in the works is the TFI "Crossing Support Group" to support the evolution of the TFI Weeklong, and to include more community input in its design. Also, TFI Board member Astrid Schillings has been forming a "Functional Pool" of people who are offering their services as potential resources for mediating and facilitating difficult situations within the larger Focusing community.

We want to be clear that these kinds of groups are different from the various “Interest Groups” or communities that function completely independently of TFI, groups that we also support and encourage. While “Interest Groups” are extremely valuable to the fabric of our community, we see this second kind of group as having a closer and more explicit connection with TFI. It is the latter kind of group that we are currently seeking to grow and expand.

Proposed Next Steps:

Moving beyond particular projects, we think it would be helpful to have several longer-term groups taking responsibility for developing and growing different key areas in the functioning of TFI. In the process, we have explored what to call these groups ... Committees? Self-Renewing Committees? Functional Wholes?

For now, we are calling these groups “Functional Committees,” crossing the idea of standing committees with TFI’s functional wholes. One way that Functional Committees are qualitatively different than regular committees is the Felt-Sensing process. As with functional wholes, part of the charter of these groups is to experiment with what it means to engage in a Felt-Sensing process while accomplishing practical work together. We want to invite people to come together around interests and tasks in a way that allows the qualities of Felt-Sensing and respectful listening to come alive.

We know that engaging in Felt-Sensing as part of planning and decision-making is one of the least understood and least developed areas in Focusing. We ourselves have been experimenting with this in our Board meetings and deliberations, and we would like to invite others to also engage in this exploration and learning process. What are the different ways we might go about creating work committees that are alive, engaging, respectful of each person’s contribution, and lead to the creation of real steps of change?

We think that each of these committees would be an “experimental space” where each group can experiment with and help to develop the creative group process that can flow from Felt-Sensing. This means that we want people on these “Functional Committees” who already know Focusing and who would like to experiment with Felt-Sensing as a group process. Our own experience so far has been that it can be energizing to work with people who have a shared understanding of Felt-Sensing and listening, and are collaborating to bring forth something new and meaningful into the world.

We are thinking of these functional committees as longer-term groups, beyond a single project focus. At the same time, we want to retain from functional wholes, the sense that people are only committing for as long as they are feeling engaged and energized by the process, and there is no obligation to continue to serve beyond that point.

Examples of Possible “Functional Committees”:

Here are three examples of what we mean by “Functional Committees.”

- 1) An International Committee. Clearly we want to continue to move towards a more internationally functioning organization. TFI has always made an effort to support the spread of Focusing around the world, and we want to learn about how we might do so in better and more creative ways. Some questions we are currently asking include: What types of organizations, associations and partnerships do we actually use to help us teach Focusing in different countries? What can we learn from various models of regional organizations and the Focusing-based teaching centers and associations that currently exist? How might TFI better serve the

needs of the regional and local organizations? One successful instance of a partnership between TFI and a regional organization is Japan; other models may be possible as well... We would like to invite any interested Coordinators to become part of this “Functional Committee,” which is being initiated by Astrid Schillings and Pat Omidian from the Board. We envision this group working as an “instance of itself.”

2) A Finance/Sustainability Committee. While TFI has grown over the last five years our financial position is still fragile. Questions we are currently asking include: How do we make Focusing and TFI financially sustainable? How do we grow our private donor base, especially making our donor base more international? How can we increase our membership base? How might we propose, secure, and implement project grants from larger private, public or non-profit organizations? How might we find ways to fund raise with local groups? How can we make international financial transactions with TFI easier? And these questions are just a beginning...

3) A Communications/Technical Committee. An immediate need exists for testing both the function and the look of our new website. Have we included the right functions and features? How does it look? Is it easy to use? Do we have a technically robust design that will allow us to add new functions and new pages? Can we provide some form of on-line translation for our discussion lists? Longer term, how do we enhance our communication capabilities? Can we make better use of video? Can we enhance our remote conferencing to support the “Functional Committees” and other conferences offered by TFI? Should we try to use social networking technologies (Facebook, Twitter, others ...)? And again there are more questions that we have yet to ask ...

We are aware there are more functions and we are open to other suggested committees, or to other ways of clustering the functions that we have suggested. From the Board’s perspective, we see these committees as encompassing three immediate needs to move TFI forward.

Practical Logistics of the “Functional Committees”:

Given an interest in and a willingness to move forward with “Functional Committees,” the Board will then create and charter the committees. Each committee will need its own charter along the following lines: “We operate from Felt-Sensing... Our functional concerns are... And we interface with TFI...”

The basic functions of each committee include gathering resources (people, information), exploring possibilities of direction, and making both planning and implementation recommendations to the Board. As part of their work, the committees will be engaging in an ongoing partnership and direct dialogue with TFI Board and Staff and with the other Functional Committees, as well as inviting input from the Focusing community at large. For example, even a straightforward international need like improving TFI’s translation capabilities will have both a technical and financial aspect. How can we do it and how much will it cost? Where and how might we gather the resources to make such a change?

We view forming these committees as a self-organizing networking process where the Coordinators will be helping shape the functions for each committee and networking to find people who have an interest in volunteering and knowledge about, or skills to offer in these critical functions.

How You Can Help:

Since this is a new proposal from the Board, you can help by commenting on and providing us with feedback on what we are proposing. All the Board members are now on the Coordinator’s

list so that we can respond to your comments and concerns. Further, we wanted to get this letter out before the International in Germany so that those thirty plus Coordinators who are attending will have time to consider our ideas, and then meet with and discuss our proposal with Astrid, Pat and Melinda during the Coordinator's meeting at the International.

We invite you to felt-sense into the following invitation: "In what ways might you like to join with us in experimenting with work committees that are alive, engaging, respectful of each person's contributions – and that lead to creating real steps of change for Focusing and for TFI?"

We look forward to reading your responses on the Coordinator's list, including (but by no means limited to!) any ideas for other committees. And if this proposal resonates with you, and you would like to nominate yourself or suggest someone else for any of the committees we have described above, please e-mail Melinda Darer (melinda@focusing.org) with your suggestions.

Thank you for your time in reading and responding to our communication.

Respectfully,
The Focusing Institute Board

Reva Bernstein, Mary Hendricks, Joan Klagsbrun, Patricia Omidian, Rob Parker, Harbert Rice, Astrid Schillings, Rosa Zubizarreta, and Melinda Darer (ex officio).