

CROSSING THE WORLD'S NEED WITH THE ENTREPRENEUR'S FELT SENSE

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Entrepreneurs setting out into the world are motivated by an internal sense of urgency. One could define their felt sense as being extremely strong, and as containing what Eugene Gendlin calls the “entrepreneurial instinct,” that is, an implicit sense of the “right next step” in the world. The explicit, or the manner in which the implicit sense is given expression, is the entrepreneurial act itself. Like creative individuals working in other fields (artists, scientists, and so forth), entrepreneurs seem, in many senses, to be “natural Focusers”—people who are attuned to their felt sense and who act from it, often in contrast to the accepted norms governing their environment.

Yet entrepreneurship, like every creative act that promotes innovation, also involves difficulties and fundamental dilemmas. Below are a number of salient examples:

- What is the nature of the innovation that I am offering? (i.e.: what lies *there* beyond what I am capable of putting into words right now).
- Is the suggested innovation moving in the right direction?
- Does this innovation stand a chance of being accepted? (i.e. of being funded, recognized).
- Am I in danger of paying an exceedingly highly personal price if I move forward with this initiative?
- How should I respond to criticism directed at me (personally) and at the entrepreneurial project I am promoting?
- How will I know if I am wrong, or if I should be going in a different direction?

In recent years, I have worked with a large number of entrepreneurs, both individually and within the framework of various groups and organizations. The work processes we undertook together were designed to promote concrete initiatives, while also providing support for the entrepreneurs themselves and for the connection between internal life-forward movement and the movement of the project in the world.

When I first began working with entrepreneurs and creators in various fields, I enthusiastically tried to introduce them to Focusing in the same way I had studied it: closing one's eyes, scanning the body, turning attention to its center, and searching for a felt sense. I found that these initial invitations provoked significant resistance: the people I worked with were developing a demanding project, and their stance towards life was for the most part active and somewhat impatient. The slow rhythm of Focusing, the quiet and deep intonation, and the consistent process of reflecting back did not suit most of them.

At a certain point I thought that Focusing was simply not compatible with the demands of individuals working in this sector. And yet, my felt sense insisted...my sense was that Focusing offers depth and ‘carrying forward’ that is relevant to any person in any field. Yet how to achieve this goal? In the following account, I describe some of the ways I developed teaching Focusing in order to answer this question.

HOW DOES FOCUSING SUPPORT THE DILEMMAS FACED BY ENTREPRENEURS: CASE STUDIES AND PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

1. What is My Vision? Working with Implicit Precision

Mike came to me after many years of working as a television editor and producer. He had decided to found an independent company that would specialize in producing programs on environmental issues and bio-technology, which would be partially funded by companies interested in promoting their products or by various agencies interested in promoting environmental issues.

At this point, the most significant dilemma was how to define Mike’s vision in a manner that would awaken curiosity both in companies and in broadcasting agencies. Mike felt that his idea “sounded unexceptional and not exciting enough.” He wanted us to hone his vision and formulate a “key statement” that would also serve as the new company’s logo.

My response surprised him: I suggested that we start by blurring his vision of the project...rather than sharpening it. Using Gendlin’s concept of implicit precision, I said: “We’re looking for the *inner sense* that compelled you to set out on this new path. On one hand, this sense is unclear; yet this unclarity contains the new component...the unique thing that you are offering. This is the life-promoting element that led you to leave your previous job and found your own company. Yet in order to do this, we must put aside the desire to create a clear, sharply defined message, and agree to *listen* to what is novel, blurry, and vague.”

We began the process by clearing a space: Mike raised concerns and fears, while I wrote each of the issues that came up on a separate sheet of paper and asked him to locate each sheet in the surrounding space in accordance with its degree of urgency. Among other things, Mike raised issues such as time pressure, the position of his business partner, the fear that he had nothing new to say...and more.

After clearing the space (which we did with open eyes and in the course of what appeared to be a regular conversation), I asked Mike to pay attention to how he felt right now, with all the sheets of paper laid out around him. He said: “The sense is more open and lighter. I see it right here in front of me, and that helps me.”

At this point I invited him to think back to the sense of urgency that he had experienced before leaving his previous job. The invitation was: **Can you remember that sense of urgency? What it was trying to push you towards?**

Mike described his sense of urgency as similar to that of someone who must pass through a door before it closes. The urgency had tried to get him out of what he defined as “a

world in disguise,” and into what he described as “the world of real people.” We gradually went deeper into this sense. Among other things, I asked Mike to stand next to the door while I stood outside the room and shut it. I asked him to notice what his body wanted to do when the door closed, and what words arose from the body.

At the end of this Focusing session, Mike had a very clear sense of the new direction he wanted to go in: he was interested in working with agencies and companies that felt a similar sense of urgency: ones who wanted to “walk out the door” and tell the world how their company was trying to change the way people live.

Mike’s redefined vision: working with companies and other agencies motivated by a sense of urgency and a need to communicate their message to the world. As he put it: “We are not going to approach these companies merely by offering a service, but rather as people who share their sense of urgency and who can relate to their deep motives.” He ended this session with a sense of deep relief, as well as wonder: how did Focusing *know* how to draw a connection between the sense of urgency that led him to leave his job as a producer and editor, and urgency as a catalyzing principle, as a vision and mode of action?

FIRST PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: ACCEPTING A STATE OF “TEMPORARY BLINDNESS” IN ORDER TO EXPLORE WHAT IS NEW

Venture capital funds that support technology entrepreneurs—as well as various agencies and authorities that support social entrepreneurs—require them to formulate a precise, clearly defined vision and message. This demand is understandable from a business point of view, yet it often results in projects that are hardly innovative, or are not related to the entrepreneur’s true passion.

Focusing offers entrepreneurs a safe environment in which to experience a state of “temporary blindness” in order to explore a new sphere, an implicit precision that translates itself into a clear statement.

I find that clearing a space by using note paper supports the process more than turning to the body, since every entrepreneur needs to have an overview of the field at stake. Yet it is also important to recognize the entrepreneur’s difficulty in entering this state of “temporary blindness” and to make room for this difficulty, as well as to work at the rhythm and degree of depth that are right for him.

The potential difficulty for the Focusing Guide in this situation is over-identification with business-related demands and a desire to achieve quick results. For me, the solution to this difficulty is related to an idea discussed by Gendlin in his article “Implicit Precision.” Gendlin argues that logical precision and implicit precision are deeply related: “Implicit precision is not unlogical. It generates logical precision.” (Gendlin, 2012, p.2)

In other words, the logical idea (“I must formulate a clear definition”) does not contradict the idea of process (“I must turn my attention to the vague, fuzzy sense that led me to embark on this journey”). Indeed, turning attention to the process will eventually give rise to an even clearer and more precise definition.

2. Entering States of Flow

The first stages of working on any entrepreneurial project require a great degree of creativity, as well as adherence to a clear, consistent process. The entrepreneur begins with an original idea and a general outline of a possible course of action, and usually assembles a small team to support him as he begins to develop his idea. Yet progress is not linear, but rather happens in fits and starts: days and weeks of despair and a sense of having no clear sense of direction, followed by sudden forward leaps and a wave of new ideas.

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, (1990) who has conducted in-depth studies of creativity, has shown that a state of creative flow arises when the right amount of tension is created between a high level of skill and a challenge that lies slightly above the existing level of skill (an exaggerated challenge will impede the possibility of flow). Creative flow is a state in which we are fully immersed in what we are doing, are “united” with the process, feel that solutions arise of their own accord, and are free of critical voices or an observing consciousness.

There is no doubt that a state of flow is highly supportive of an entrepreneurial project in its first stages of development. Such a state allows for the resolution of difficulties and the overcoming of conceptual obstacles and seemingly insoluble problems. Yet can Focusing facilitate entrance into such states? And is Focusing itself a “state of flow”?

The answer to the second question is complex. Focusing is a state that includes flow, yet is not a classical flow state. Focusing may transport the Focuser to vague, image-laden realms that lead to carrying forward, yet this carrying forward cannot always be understood in practical terms. I find that in order to allow entrepreneurs to successfully enter a state of flow, we must carefully define our invitations and move, like a pendulum, between invitations that appeal to an internal, personal sphere, and ones that are oriented towards implementation in reality. In addition, we must be familiar with the principles of flow states and rely on them as we work.

Example: The “Green Runners” are a group of social entrepreneurs intent on promoting an innovative urban project in Tel Aviv. I met them after they had been working together for several months. They had entered a state of frustration and were at a loss as to how to move on. Roni, one of the entrepreneurs, agreed to try a Focusing approach with the entire group. After meeting with the group members and listening to a brief description of the project’s current state, I offered the following invitation: **“Let yourself feel the challenge you have set out to meet with this project. Where is it right now in relation to your body? Higher? Lower? About your height?”**

Roni described the project as being about as high as the ceiling, in a place he could not reach. He also described the frustration experienced by him and his colleagues. “Perhaps we’ve chosen a challenge that is too big for us, a task that we cannot fulfill,” he said. I suggested resisting the temptation to jump to conclusions, and just continue to feel the challenge. I then offered another invitation: **“Can you sense what capabilities or skills you are missing, in order to make progress with this project?”**

Roni paused for a while, and then described the skills. He felt that there were very many of them and that they were very scattered. He felt that some belonged to members of the group, while others “aren’t present in the room.” At this point I invited him and his colleagues to take the set of wooden building blocks I had brought with me and to cover them with notes describing the skills they already had for the project. I asked each participant to say something about what he had written and invited Roni to gather the blocks and decide what to do with them. He built a graduated structure and added several more blocks which he described as “skills still missing on our team.” He was also able to offer a partial description of these skills.

I invited him to feel the challenge as he experienced it right now. Had something changed? Roni said that the challenge was no longer up by the ceiling, but rather “just a little over our heads, so that we can almost catch it with our hands...” He added that the main challenge concerned the group itself: how to involve additional people in the project, so that they could contribute the missing skills.

I asked about his most dominant sense concerning the new challenge, and about what he needed in order to meet it. I also asked him to take some time before answering. Several minutes later, he answered: “It’s surprising. Our entrepreneurial team needs to go on a trip together...to feel we have embarked on a journey and to sense our closeness to one another. Only after we get closer will we be able to draw additional people to support this project.”

In conclusion, I asked for responses from the entire group. One of the most significant responses was: “What happened was surprising on one level, yet after Roni spoke, it seemed almost obvious. As if it were the next obvious step that we hadn’t been able to see.” Most of the participants identified with what Roni had sensed, and felt that his insights represented a shared space. One or two of them said they had additional ideas, and I invited them to share what they sensed and to expand upon what the group already knows.

SECOND PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: USING PHYSICAL SPACE TO CREATE A PENDULUM MOVEMENT BETWEEN INTERNAL EXPERIENCE AND REALITY

An entrepreneur is a person operating in a very real world with clearly defined demands and pressures. Focusing facilitates the creation of a clear pendulum movement between invitations that suggest how the situation may be sensed from “within,” and ones that connect the Focuser to a sense of reality. I discovered the advantages of using physical space during a workshop on Wholebody Focusing with Glenn Fleisch, and later with Kevin McEvenue. A number of ideas based on their work play a highly significant role in working with entrepreneurs. I have found that the space in which the physical body moves and is present is more accessible to entrepreneurs than the classical Focusing space (that of turning attention to the center of the body).

A question such as: “Where is this challenge located in relation to your body right now?” invites a sense of the body in space, yet is non-threatening because it “appears to

be external.” Similarly, the use of blocks, sheets of paper, and additional props supports the ability to move between internal sensations and suggestions for concrete action without experiencing resistance to the process.

3. Finding the Right Direction From Within the Felt Sense

The following phenomenon is very familiar to entrepreneurs: the exciting and turbulent period devoted to the consolidation of a concept and to the initiation of a work process is sometimes followed by a loss of direction: nothing seems to work: experiments fail, the funds that were promised are not delivered, some of the partners give up, and there is a sense of being stuck. At this stage, support through Focusing turns in the opposite direction than the one described above: we are not looking for what is still vague and unknown, but rather for a sense of inner knowing about the right direction.

Otto Scharmer, a senior lecturer at MIT and the founding chair of the Presencing Institute, has developed Theory U as a model for cultivating a sense of inspired inner leadership with a clear vision in both individuals and organizations. Scharmer interviewed dozens of leading entrepreneurs worldwide, and his conclusions are based on an analysis of these interviews. He uses the term “downloading” to define the type of situation I described above—i.e., a situation in which an individual (or an organization) is operating according to conditioned, pre-programmed patterns. The model developed by Scharmer offers a method for shifting from a state of “download” to one he calls “presencing” (a term closely related to the terminology of Focusing)—a state of wide presence that leads to action. In order to move in this direction, Scharmer suggests considering three questions:

1. What information do I take for granted? (the download data).
2. What do I see, clearly and without judgment, when I observe the situation directly?
3. What do I feel? What is the deep sense of the situation?

Scharmer argues that these questions enable individuals to get in touch with a reality that is larger than them. He adds that this point of departure may give rise to an action that emerges of its own accord, and which can have a significant, powerful impact on reality.

Scharmer’s third question obviously relates directly to Focusing. Yet the two questions I would like to discuss in greater depth are the first and second questions, so as to identify how crossing them with Focusing can bring about a significant shift.

When an entrepreneur feels that “nothing works,” he is relying on reality-based data as well as on his interpretation of it. For instance, the data may be that the investor we appealed to during the pre-seed stage (that of raising the initial capital for the project) declined to invest. Our interpretation is: the project is going in the wrong direction, and we stand no chance of raising money. Yet is this interpretation actually right?

In the course of Focusing on the first question (“What is your download?”), I suggest that the entrepreneur write down all the facts on one sheet of paper, and all his interpretations on another. We distance the sheets of paper from one another to the point that he can

sense an ability to distinguish between facts and interpretations. Interesting invitations at this stage include:

- **What is the sense that arises when you notice the difference between facts and interpretations?**

I often suggest that the entrepreneur determine the *right distance* between the list of interpretations and the list of facts, and decide when it is sufficient to produce a shift and a sense of relief. Oftentimes, the feeling will be remarkably positive, leading to a different interpretation of the facts.

- **What lies beneath the interpretation? What internal or external voice is present there**

This invitation suggests a meeting with the inner critic in order to examine its impact on decision making. This process enables the entrepreneur to recognize both internal and external critical voices and to identify to what extent they influence him and blur his vision.

We begin Focusing with the second question: What do I see directly? By drawing a personal map that describes the situation as the entrepreneur sees it. The map is schematic, and represents the elements the entrepreneur is concerned with and the relations between them (which are charted using arrows). I then suggest that the entrepreneur carefully observe what he drew and describe it in detail, without interpretation.

We then go on to work with a number of invitations. Some examples include:

- **What is the sense that arises as you describe the details? What are they trying to teach you?**

The concept that guides me is that the map itself is a type of felt sense, which contains implicit information. The details the entrepreneur describe are the “living edge” of this yet-unknown information, and contact with them will enable carrying forward.

- **What do you know about what is imprecise in the map? What would you change about it so that a more precise sense arises?**

The idea here is that when we identify what is imprecise... something in us also knows what is precise... I often invite the entrepreneur to draw the new picture (that is, to draw the felt sense of the “right” situation). This picture can then lead further in a new and more promising direction. This strategy makes indirect use of Eugene Gendlin’s invitation: If the picture was what it was meant to be, what would it be? Yet in order to create a more concrete connection to reality, we work with a schematic drawing of a map.

Visual representations have wide-ranging potential in attempting to find new directions that “feels right.” Once the potential is revealed, one can feel a palpable energetic shift

in the room—excitement returns, new ideas are raised, and the general sense is of *carrying forward*.

THIRD PRINCIPLE OF ACTION: IT IS POSSIBLE TO FOCUS DIRECTLY ON OUR IMPLICIT KNOWING, AND TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT DIRECTION “FROM WITHIN” THE WRONG DIRECTION

Entrepreneurship is a series of directed actions. The entrepreneur comes up with an idea, and starts moving in the direction that appears most promising. Along the way, however, he is often required to re-navigate and find a more precise direction. In a state of “feeling lost,” there is a built-in tendency to return to old patterns (for instance: despair, anger, a tendency to repeatedly perform the same action, and more). Classical Focusing may prove supportive in this state, yet the new direction will not always reveal itself.

The third principle points to a valuable possibility: we carry implicit knowledge about the right direction. Something knows... Just as the poet senses the first line of a poem by identifying what words are not right so the entrepreneur can sometimes sense the right direction by identifying what feels wrong. (Gendlin, 1993).

I have found that applying Scharmer’s ideas as a basis for Focusing invitations opens up new possibilities. The difference he posits between “seeing something with crystal clarity” and “sensing something deeply,” for instance, helped me to define invitations that unfold on two different levels, with the first level (“What do you see?”) serving as a basis for the second level (“What do you sense when you see?”). Some people seem to have an easier time connecting to a felt sense when they create a visible picture of the parameters pertaining to the question or problem. These applications are worthy of being further developed.

FOCUSING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

Focusing with entrepreneurs (as well as creators in other fields) can take place with open eyes, while using a fairly normal intonation. Reflections will also be offered in a matter-of-fact tone.

1. It is unnecessary to offer any explanation about Focusing or to try and conceptualize its meaning. Most entrepreneurs and artists are not interested in understanding the process (they have no interest in my profession...) but rather prefer to get to the issue itself.
2. It is preferable to begin the guided Focusing session by diagnosing the problem at hand. It is advisable to use external props (drawing a map, working with notes or sheets of paper in space), in order to enable the entrepreneur to work with his felt sense in a clearer, more spatially embodied manner.
3. The use of physical space is highly significant. Entrepreneurship is a mode of action in which a person’s inner feelings are related to the field in which he operates. The felt sense of the “field” is just as relevant as the person’s felt sense of himself.

4. It is extremely important that the entrepreneur leave the meeting with practical ideas for action. A Focusing session that ends with no more than a sense of an inner shift is insufficient for most entrepreneurs. It is thus advisable to devote at least half an hour during the meeting to the question: Where does all of this take you? What can you do with the information that arose here?
5. As Focusing guides in the entrepreneurial arena, we must be familiar with its work conditions with the various stages of entrepreneurial processes. Focusing in this world invites a relatively active focuser, who holds a wide perspective on available possibilities.

Some Reflections, Reactions, and Thoughts about Future Development:

My thinking about the use of Focusing in creative processes grew out of a personal need: as a writer and an entrepreneur of various projects, I was both surprised and excited to discover how easy it was to enter the creative process by relying on my knowledge of Focusing tools: I began “experimenting” in the “laboratory” of my personal computer. For instance, I examined my felt sense as I prepared to enter the writing process, and then turned to see if I could get a felt sense of the story itself, as if the story knew “what it needs in order to carry itself forward.” I went on to see how I could work with a felt sense to plan a workshop, and how to use Focusing to work with something that had yet to come into existence (such as an idea that still needs to be developed).

Reflecting back on this process, I can identify several interesting points: as I already noted, many creative individuals and entrepreneurs can access their felt sense in a quick, intuitive manner. At the same time, they do not operate in the creative sphere out of a sense of presence, but rather out of a sense of total identification with whatever arises. Moreover, an understanding of how the process unfolds provided me with a greater sense of calm and confidence—with the sense that even if things remain unclear right now, they will become clearer as I continue to sit with them. This sense of confidence grew from one Focusing session to the next, and later also, enabled me to feel confidence in supporting others.

Finally, I discovered that it was possible to Focus in additional ways and with different types of felt senses that I had not encountered as a Focusing student—such as the felt sense of the field, the felt sense of something that was not yet present in my life yet, whose absence was felt, a felt sense of the next step I should take, and more. These personal discoveries gradually provided me with the courage to work with creators and entrepreneurs.

The reactions I have received in recent years are highly encouraging. I use Focusing in working with individuals (entrepreneurs, creators, and others interested in promoting their projects), as well as with groups and large entrepreneurial projects. Most of these individuals experience the process as highly beneficial, and often note the element of surprise and discovery. There are also, however, those who view the process as strange and not practical enough.

These positive reactions offer encouragement for further exploring creative ways of working with Focusing principles in a direct and easily palatable manner. In order to do so, I have formed a group of Certified Focusing Trainers with a special interest in the fields of creativity and entrepreneurship. This group is currently exploring additional directions that bring together Focusing, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Some subjects of exploration include:

- What inner stance should the Focusing guide formulate in a situation that demands action (such as working on a project?) How can one be an active guide while remaining without an agenda and avoiding identification?
- How can one, in the context of Focusing, make use of the entrepreneur's previous success stories in order to create forward movement from a state of being blocked? This is where we use the ideas put forth by Gendlin in TAE concerning textual analysis and work on inherent connections.
- In the entrepreneurial and creative fields, one often creates pilots or models. Is it possible to construct a Focusing model (i.e., a series of Focusing actions that may be adapted for personal use) that can enable the entrepreneur to consistently support himself throughout the process, without the help of a guide?
- What is the optimal way to create a sensory connection between the entrepreneur's ideas and dreams and between concrete actions?

This new collaborative process of investigation obviously relies on Focusing, as well as on other creative processes, and is accompanied by a sense of true excitement. There are still many questions requiring our attention, yet new paths seem to be opening up. The temporary name of this new sphere—which connects the depth of Focusing to the performance of creative, concrete actions in the world—is “FocusingFlow.” We look forward to receive reflections and feedback on these ideas, and to continue carrying them forward in the world.

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