
LEARNING WORKS FOR ALL OF US

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Valentine's Day 2003

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A BOOK FOR VALENTINES

A wonderful book has come our way. Last year I had the privilege of attending a one-day workshop delivered by Michelle LeBaron, a Canadian, who is at present a professor of conflict analysis and resolution at George Mason University in Virginia. Today I am relishing the experience of beautiful writing, intellectual challenge, thought-provoking ideas and, most of all, an emotional connection that she inspires in her book *"Bridging Troubled Waters."*

As readers and/or practitioners in the field of conflict resolution, we are invited to conduct our business with inspiring creativity. We are encouraged first to connect more deeply with our own spirituality and emotions so that we can use them more in our practice. Michelle challenges us to question the formulaic "intellectual" methods of mediation and conflict resolution and, to instead learn to listen more to our intuition, to "feel" rather than "think" about the best way to support peace and resolution. By so doing, we become more connected to the needs of our clients.

I am reminded of an experience whilst coaching at the Justice Institute in the Conflict Resolution Programme. One of the students in my group had attended several of the classes and was determinedly working towards achieving his certificate. Without a doubt he had mastered the "skills" and understood the four-stage formula. However, in role play with his classmates he became stuck. None of the skills worked and fellow participants became edgy and upset. I soon realized that he was, very calmly, thinking his way through the process without any emotion or use of intuition. The others felt no connection. He was not able to build a relationship of any kind with them and they felt lost and frustrated. Though as a group we talked about ("analyzed and intellectualized") what would have worked better, I am not sure this student "got it in the gut." If I had my creative tool kit suggested by Michelle LeBaron, I may have been much more supportive by encouraging

and allowing the group to get out of the head space and listen to what their bodies and hearts were shouting.

In her book, not surprisingly subtitled "Conflict Resolution from the Heart", Michelle encourages us to become aware of the stories our bodies are telling us long before our head catches on, of using movement, breathing, spaces. She suggests metaphors as a way of connecting with ourselves and others, helping us to make meaning of the challenges we face. She explores the use of ritual, storytelling and personal spirituality. And, above all, she invites us to be courageous in our approach to "be" rather than "do" our work, our relationships, our lives.

Rumour has it Michelle is returning to Canada to work at the University of British Columbia. What a gift that will be for us all. Enjoy the book and Happy Valentine's Day!

Jane Roberts

[LeBaron, Michelle (2002), Bridging Troubled Waters: Conflict Resolution from the Heart Jossey-Bass]

Next Breakfast Meeting

For those of you in the Vancouver area, our next breakfast meeting is on February 13, 2003. This is a time for us to meet and share ideas. Please join us at 8:00 a.m. at:
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