

Draft
Summary Minutes from The Focusing Institute Board Retreat
April 10-11, 2010

The Focusing Institute Board met in person for a retreat at Stony Point, NY on April 10 and 11, 2010. Gene Gendlin joined the Board's retreat on the first day, April 10.

Overview of the Board's Retreat. At its retreat the Board recognized and agreed that TFI is in a transitional organization phase, and that we now have a need and an opportunity to create a newer, more broadly based TFI organization. Major portions of the Board's discussions and decisions were directed towards making TFI a more internationally functioning organization, and identifying what functions and structures we need to enhance or create to move TFI in a more participatory direction.

1. Financial Considerations. Harbert Rice and Melinda Darer reported on TFI's current financial position. Looking at income and expenses they have developed a cash flow projection model to help manage TFI's finances. TFI operates on a cash flow basis. In reviewing 2009, the majority of TFI's income was generated through workshops, conferences, and product sales (about 60%) and membership dues and fees (about 25%). While monetary donations make up less than one-fifth of our operating income, they are critically important; they are the difference at the margin. TFI's main expenses are in payroll, workshops, and consulting. These expenses are currently running about 50K USD per month and closely track income.

The basic income and expense pattern for TFI has been having more money coming in at the beginning of the year (due mainly to donations), then about mid-year have more money go out (negative cash flow) for the balance of the year. At year's end, TFI usually has shown a small net income, which has allowed it to grow year on year. However, TFI's financial position is still fragile. One key metric in prudently managing cash flow is the level of operating cash reserves. TFI's net income last year was 48K USD. TFI retained this income to increase its operating reserves from a quite fragile 1.5 months to about 2.5 months. As TFI grows, the Board agreed to improve TFI's financial position by setting a goal of gradually increasing its operating reserves to 6 months' reserves over the next two to five years. Besides building TFI's reserves, we also agreed to create an intentional division of non-allocated funds into operating expenses and infrastructure improvements.

For the current year 2010, we estimate that TFI's income will be down 50K USD. This decrease is due to less income in donations, but mostly due to about 40K less in workshop and conference income. At best, we expect breakeven at the end of the year.

2. Staffing Considerations. Again, looking at TFI's financial position, the Board agreed that TFI's growth has come about in part due to the long hours that Melinda Darer, and now her part-time assistant Elizabeth Cantor have put in. We cannot expect to continue to maintain or grow TFI at the same staffing level that we had five years ago, and without upgrading our office software and procedures. In effect, we are in a "Catch-22" situation

where we need to add staff to grow TFI and improve our office operations, and where our financial situation (above) is too fragile to allow us to commit to taking on new staff.

It would be helpful to bring in another person at the bottom, instead of another person at the top. It would be a smaller financial outlay, and free up the current staff to take on larger projects and delegate more routine tasks. We estimate 25K for another part-time person, and 20-25K for moving Elizabeth up. The bottom line is if we had more staff, Melinda could be working with Pat Omidian and others to do more outreach to foundations as a source of funding.

3. Fund Raising Letter. The Board agreed that the next and most direct step to solving our staffing need is to seek a “boost” in funds by sending out an April fund raising letter to the Focusing Community. Based on TFI’s prior performance, we expect that the increased staffing will pay for itself both through an increase in projects and developing alternative sources of income.

4. Structural Changes. TFI is a very small organization. Despite our small size, we have managed to effectively spread Focusing because our organizational model is to function as a network builder, supporting and encouraging others to create projects, and serving as a resource for materials and training.

Recently, we have been looking for ways to involve more people in the functioning of TFI. We have expanded our use of “Functional Wholes” to address needs like more community support and input in the TFI Weeklong, an intermediate Focusing Award “Proficiency as a Focusing Partner”, and most recently a “Functional Pool” of people who will offer their services as resources for mediating and facilitating difficult situations within our Focusing community.

The Board agreed that we need to expand participation in TFI to address those areas where the Board lacks the skills and/or time to address critical areas, and also to address a long-standing concern, particularly among Coordinators, for the lack of say in the functioning of TFI. We currently think that it would be helpful to have several longer-term groups taking responsibility for developing and growing critical areas in the functioning of TFI. For now, we will call such groups “Functional Committees,” crossing the idea of standing committees with TFI’s functional wholes. Here we are talking about longer-term “project teams” that would have an explicit connection with TFI.

We discussed three possible examples of “Functional Committees:” 1) An International Committee that would examine how we currently use organizations in different countries to help teach Focusing, and how we might find and create better ways for TFI to function with regional and local organizations; 2) A Finance/Sustainability Committee that would work to make TFI financially sustainable, and both more diverse and more international in its funding; and 3) A Communications/Technical Committee that would address our immediate need for testing both the function and the look of our new website, and longer-term on how we can improve our use of communications and computer technology.

We are sure there are more critical functions and we are open to other suggested committees, or to other ways of clustering the functions that we have suggested.

One thing that will make these Functional Committees different from regular committees is that we propose that part of their charter will be to experiment with what it means to engage in a Felt-Sensing process while working together on practical projects. We view engaging in Felt-Sensing as a group process in planning and decision-making as one of the least understood and least developed areas in Focusing. This is the same type of group process that we have begun to use in our Board meetings and deliberations. In effect, we propose to create an “experimental space” where each group can experiment with and help develop the creative group process that can flow from Felt-Sensing. This means that we want people on these “Functional Committees” who both already know Focusing and would like to experiment with Felt-Sensing as a group process.

5) Letter to Coordinators Proposing “Functional Committees”. The Board agreed that the next step is to put forward a letter to Coordinators on the Coordinator’s List seeking their interest in and willingness to move forward with helping us form “Functional Committees.” Further, we want to get this letter out prior to the International so that Coordinators who are going to the International will have a chance to see our proposal prior to the Coordinator’s meeting there.

6) Changes in the Board’s Composition. A second step that we can take towards more international participation in TFI is to increase international representation on the Board. Ideally, we would like to find people with experience and skills that the current Board lacks. The Board agreed to expand by creating two or three new Board positions. As is the current Board policy, we agreed to begin a search and invitation process with Gene Gendlin and Mary Hendricks taking the lead, but other Board members may propose candidates as well. Final approval of a candidate is by consensus.

7) Statement on “What is TFI? – Benefits of Membership”. In addition to our two letters (above), the Board agreed that we need a third letter that would spell out in one or two pages all the great things that TFI does in the world and what people get by being a member – in addition to the pleasure of helping spread and support Focusing and its good works. Again, we would like to have a version of this letter available for distribution at the International. However, if we do not have a version ready for the International, we still need a clear statement of who we are, what we are doing, and what benefits we offer to our members. This is a first needed step towards creating a Strategic Plan (below).

8) Strategic Plan. In further discussions on seeking additional funding, the Board agreed that our single greatest need and priority is to create and have in place a strategic plan composed of a) where we are currently (both financials and accomplishments), b) what our growth goals are, and c) some possible pathways for reaching our goals, including brief descriptions of potential programs that we are interested in and capable of doing if the funding is available. This plan is a first requirement for seeking any non-profit institutional funding. All of the structural and functional changes we have identified (above), and have started to implement are part of setting out a direction of where we want to go and having a financial model of how we want to proceed so that we can offer a clear picture of TFI to potential funding sources.

9) International Programs. As part of our planning process, Pat Omidian working with Rosa Zubizarreta and Harbert Rice has developed a funding model for International Programs to develop Community/Wellness Focusing projects. In this model, TFI will act as contractor to provide Focusing training and materials to the funding organization. The first instance for this model will be working with the government administrators of FATA, the tribal district of Pakistan to jointly develop Community/Wellness programs in that area of Pakistan. As a next step, Pat will take this funding model to the Community/Wellness Focusing workshop next weekend to refine it in discussions there, and with a view to replicating the same type of funding in other developing areas.

With these discussions and next steps in hand, the Board spent time refining our planning ideas (above) and/or taking up other issues that required further attention or a decision by the Board.

10) New TFI Website. The new design for TFI's website is up and running in a test mode. While we have laid out the need for help from knowledgeable users in a Functional Committee (above) to help with the continuing testing and design process, we recognize finding people and forming the committee will take time. In the interim, we discussed asking Josiah Hincks (who helped design the Gendlin Library) to see if he could help us with the website by a) reviewing the new design, and b) guide us in finding and forming a technical committee. Mary Hendricks agreed to contact Josiah to ask him if he will help us.

11) Vision Statement on Conflict Resolution. After reviewing several drafts, the Board agreed to put out a simple vision statement on supporting Focusing in areas or among peoples in conflict. The statement is:

"As we look to carry Focusing into areas where conflict exists, we may encounter situations where Focusing is being carried forward by peoples separated by conflict. We want to make a very clear statement of our vision that Focusing is a part of a peaceful solution in any conflict area. Focusing goes beyond politics. It supports Felt Sense to Felt Sense human conversations. The Focusing Institute looks forward to supporting projects of teaching Focusing on both sides among peoples in conflict. We hope to build channels of communication through which Focusers from each side of a conflict can support each others' work for peaceful outcomes."

12) Conflict and Mediation “Functional Pool”. The Board expressed its deep appreciation to Astrid Schillings for her work in creating a “Functional Pool” of people willing to offer their services to help mediate conflicts within the Focusing community. As a next step, Astrid will post a description of the “Pool” and its participants on the Coordinator’s List.

13) An Evolving FOT Functional Committee. Joan Klagsbrun reported that the former program committee from the FOT conference is currently meeting by phone every 4 to 6 weeks. They have begun to gather writings (articles and book chapters) that have been published on Focusing-Oriented Therapy that are not currently on the website. For now, they are simply gathering them in one place so the materials will not be lost. We hope to put them on the website after we look into laws about copyright, etc. This Functional

Committee is also looking at creating some future online/phone/skype FOT courses in the next year, which could enrich the offerings of TFI (below).

14) Phone Classes as Fundraisers. The Board discussed ways that TFI might increase its income by making more use of teleconferencing. One of the ideas that Joan Klagsbrun suggested and that we discussed was offering teleconferences for free as an introduction to a course that could be offered for a fee. We could do six or seven of these classes per year. We also discussed offering on-line courses for Continuing Education (CE) credits. The direction of our discussions was to find ways to reach beyond our current membership. As a next step, Melinda Darer and Joan will meet to explore these ideas further.

15) How We Present Ourselves to the World. The Board discussed our lack of materials for presenting TFI and what it stands for and what it does. Rob Parker started this discussion by presenting two concerns: a) how FOT relates to and is viewed by mainstream psychology, and b) how we appeal to and reach younger generations. As a next step, Rob will post some materials on the FOT list to start a conversation on how FOT relates to mainstream psychology.

In further discussion, the Board agreed that we want to emphasize “Community” in our outreach. We need to say and invite people into “Focusing... Partnership... Community”. We need to offer not just making meaning, but also an opportunity to connect with others. We need to let people know that once you learn Focusing, a door opens up. You can find a community where you can connect with others who are already interested in and can share a common ground with you. We want anyone who has contact with TFI to receive an invitation to connect with others through TFI.

16) Small Steps Toward Becoming More International. We discussed two small steps that we could explore to make TFI more international. The first is to try to make it easier for people to read English-language posts. Astrid Schillings suggested that we examine having a word translator like Leo available for reading posts on our lists. Leo is not a full document translator, but rather offers a word look up so that a person can translate key words in a post. A second step would be to make it easier for people to donate or pay for transactions with TFI by offering a PayPal option. Melinda Darer will follow up on seeing what it will take to bring up PayPal.

17) The Focusing Partnership Program (FPP). After reviewing the Partnership Program, the Board decided to phase out the FPP in its current form. While our initial impetus for reviewing the program was financial (the program is not and has not been self-supporting), when we examined the program more closely we found that it is made up of two parts: a) a pool of participants seeking partners, and b) a training program offering a fixed number of training sessions to bring inexperienced people up to a level to support a partnership. The partnership pool has a low participation rate, and the Board felt there was a safety issue present in offering a small fixed number of training sessions where learning Focusing can be a highly variable process.

In principle, the Board agreed that we want to keep a Partnership program in some form, but it will take time to find a form that provides for more participation. One model that

the Board briefly discussed, for example, is asking people to find a partner in their home area and linking those dyads with teachers-in-training, who would provide Focusing over the phone as part of their training. (This would not necessarily be the equivalent of “Level One”, nor lead to pool eligibility, but would simply lead to dyads being able to Focus together, people informally teaching others.) For people who can pay, we could simply refer to teachers who offer Level One by phone for pool eligibility. Clearly, we need to find better ways of using the Focusing training resources that already are in place.

With these considerations in mind, the Board agreed to phase out the current program in a three-month time frame. As follow on steps, we need to post a note to Coordinators, Trainers, and Members that we are in transition with the Partnership program, and that while we will contact people in and keep the Partnership pool, we will be searching for more cost effective ways to offer training with volunteers and trainees.

We want to thank Lori for her years of service to TFI, her thoughtful innovation of the current program and the visionary role she undertook in forming the Partnership program. Further, we want to ask Lori to share what she has learned in carrying the program in its current form, and what ideas she might offer to increase participation in the program going forward.

18) Robert Lee’s Proposal for the Weeklong. Robert Lee has put forward an idea to increase participation in and provide for more income support for the Weeklong. The Board feels that his proposal offers many benefits to the Weeklong and recommends that he share it with the “Weeklong Crossing Support Group” to further develop the plan. The Board also asks that the information about this plan, as it develops, be shared with Trainers, not just with Coordinators. Mary Hendricks will contact Robert Lee to let him know that the Board likes and supports the development of his plan.

19) Conversation on School Project. The Board discussed Lucinda Gray’s proposal to provide materials and teach Focusing in schools taking a “train-the-trainers” approach sponsored by TFI. The Board liked Lucinda’s proposal and agreed that Mary Hendricks and Melinda Darer have a conversation with Lucinda about next steps. One possibility is forming a functional whole with people from TFI and the Children’s Focusing Board to support the project. To further the review, Harbert Rice offered to review the materials provided by Lucinda and provide the Board with a report.

20) Preparing for the International. With Melinda Darer we discussed materials for TFI’s information packet for her to take to the International in May. The materials we discussed were: a) a brief statement about what TFI is and what it does accompanied by TFI’s financials, b) our diversity and vision statements, c) our April fund raising letter, d) our letter proposal to the Coordinators for Functional Committees, and e) if possible, these summary minutes (or a link) to these minutes.

21) Closing. In closing, we reviewed and brought forward our own commitment to the process that we followed as a group. We had expressed our need for each other’s company, support, and collaboration. The outcomes we sought were unity in moving forward. We wanted to have a quiet centering before we started anything, and seek those energy shifts to get the form that will carry forward, that feeling of balance between

short-term doable steps and our long-term vision of direction. Finally, we talked about the qualities that we brought and experienced during our deliberations: wisdom and freshness, caring kindness, wanting to and listening to each other, and gathering together and allowing our creativity to find its own form. We closed with a simple affirmation of one another and the group.

22) Next Board Meeting. The next Board meeting will be on 20 May 2010 via phone from 11 am to 12:30 pm EDT.

Respectfully,

Harbert Rice and Rosa Zubizaretta