

## A SEVENTH MOVEMENT: ACTION STEP AND 'FOCUSING ON THE GO'

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### ABSTRACT

In the past decade, Eugene Gendlin has emphasized the importance of bringing an action step to the Focusing Process. According to Gendlin the Focusing process without an action step is like a car with its motor running, but not moving.

In the year 2000, when we co-founded the Israeli Focusing Center, we added a seventh movement called an *Action Step* right after completing the step of *Receiving*. This Action Step was also added as a response to the Israeli participants' special cultural demands to learn a process that is applicable in the here and now, and effective in handling daily stressful events.

In addition, our teaching program also consists of a special unit called: 'Focusing on the Go'. This unit attempts to weave Focusing into the public language and daily conversations in order to integrate Focusing as a way of being and living.

Our Israeli participants' self-reports of personal changes and inner transformation have supported the value of introducing a seventh movement as Action Step and 'Focusing on the Go'.

### INTRODUCTION

Eugene Gendlin speaks of Focusing as a "potential for a new kind of a relationship and a new kind of society, transcending outmoded roles and patterns... a society of new pattern-makers" (Gendlin, 2007).

We have been inspired and influenced by Gendlin's vision of this new society and looked for ways to make this vision tangible and applicable for everyday life in a society living in a survival mode.

Israelis are known to be eager to learn new processes to increase quality of living in the 'here and now', and to deal with their life stressors more effectively. They request that these processes be efficient, applicable, and useful in life. Many of our early participants expressed different frustrations after practicing Focusing such as, "*O.K., I just focused, but what is the next step? or How can my inner shift help me tomorrow in my job? or What can I do to manage my anger toward my boss at work?*"

From the participants' point of view there is paramount value in experiencing a full Focusing process: the physical shifts and the insights, and yet they were looking for the 'more' that they could do *in addition* to the inner process.

Traditionally, the Focusing process consists of inner movements, but the challenge we faced was how to further extend those inner movements and insights and anchor them

in the outer reality so they could be easily and effectively applied in real life situations. The importance of not stopping with inner movements and shifts in experiencing was noted by Gendlin several years after his original publication of the Six Steps. He stated that, "Steps of Focusing and steps of outward action often alternate. Each aids the other" (Gendlin, 2007).

As a result, we have been teaching Focusing along two tracks side by side. One track is the traditional Focusing Process with the six movements as a self-process and in partnerships. The second track has to do with two new developments that we have implemented in our teaching. The first one is a seventh movement called Action Step that is offered after the Receiving step, and the second one is 'Focusing on the Go' which provides an opportunity to incorporate and weave Focusing into daily language, so that it stands out as a new way of thinking and speaking.

### ***1. Seventh Movement: Action Step***

In our model, after the Receiving movement (in which the Focuser purposefully gives thanks and acknowledgement for whatever steps or movement occurred), we added a seventh movement, Action Step, that takes Focusing to yet another level of practice and application in daily living. Now, a Focuser is not only rewarded with a felt shift during a Focusing process in his or her inner world, but also can be rewarded in the outer relationship world by applying and practicing one or more small action steps.

We have seen a whole set of new possibilities open up to the Focusers whenever they do a seventh movement, the Action Step. Once they choose the action step and make a verbal commitment to doing it the following week, they often experience new *felt senses*. It is through the body's *sense of meaning* that a person can experience shifts and changes in relationship to an issue. By practicing one or more action steps in the external world, a new interactive process happens between the Focuser and the event — or another person. This interaction with the environment implies new different steps and new shifts.

## **LEADING INTO A SEVENTH MOVEMENT: ACTION STEP**

At the end of the Focusing process, after the Receiving movement, the Listener invites the Focuser to take the seventh movement: "*Please, take a moment and sit quietly with **all** that came for you in your Focusing process... and ask yourself: What is a meaningful small action step(s) that you would like to anchor and practice this coming week?*" *The Focuser finds one or more action steps and resonates the step(s).*

*S/he invites the body wisdom to provide a body felt sense to the possibility of applying the action step(s). The Focuser has an opportunity to do a mental rehearsal, right then and there, and experience the Listener's reflective response.*

For example: Judith just finished a full Focusing process regarding her relationship with her 20 year old daughter. She acknowledged her inability to feel close and loving toward her daughter. At the end of the Receiving step, she sat quietly with both her pain and her stuck place. After she opened her eyes and was back from her inner journey, she was offered a seventh movement — the Action Step. The Listener asked Judith, "*Please consider the*

*whole process that you just completed and ask what is the one small action step that you want to anchor and be committed to this coming week?"* Judith was quiet for a long moment and then said, "I know it is going to be difficult to do...but I would like to initiate a dinner with my daughter." Her statement was followed with an excitement and a big smile as if she could not wait to move forward with her action step. The Listener reflected her excitement, which brought Judith to say, "I am going to make the invitation tomorrow morning." A week later she reported to the group how important that dinner was for her and her daughter, who responded very positively to their reconnection. We believe that offering a seventh movement of Action Step forms a loop between the person's inner space and outer reality. This loop coincides with Gendlin's perception of the body as an organism that exists in a constant ongoingness with the environment where one feeds and nurtures the other.

Another example: A Focuser ended a process regarding her inability to function at work because of her critical boss. In her Focusing process she found places of fear and vulnerability. After the dialogue and the Receiving movements, she was instructed to find one Action Step that she could practice the following week. When she sat with all that came up for her during the Focusing process, she stated that she would like to practice looking directly at her boss when he criticizes her, rather than looking away from him. The following week she happily reported to the group that after few days of practice, she was finally able to look at her boss even as he was critiquing her performance. As a result her inner place of fear was greatly reduced.

## **2. 'Focusing on the Go'**

We define 'Focusing on the Go' as the ability of a Focuser to introduce one or several steps of the Focusing process, as needed, without going into a full inner process when encountering different events or people on a daily basis.

Our vision is that Focusing invitations and guiding suggestions become an integral part of our daily conversations. As such, our Focusers are encouraged to use Focusing language in their daily encounters in the office, on the street, at lunch or over coffee. They are requested to use metaphors and images when they tell their stories and dip into their inner experience to share the subjective intricacies of their felt sense. They are also supported in offering Focusing invitations and guiding as part of the flow of their social conversations to facilitate stories and new meanings.

### Examples:

Josh is a 5 years old boy who barged into the house very angry. His mother looked at him and reflected, "Oh...I see a *big* anger...is your anger as big as this...? (illustrating with her hands in front of her body the size of a tennis ball) or... is your anger a lot bigger...? (illustrating with her hands in front of her body the size of a basketball). Josh pointed out to her second hand's motion and then collapsed into her arms crying.

Sarah is a perfectionist and finds herself overwhelmed with her work. She was taught to do 'Focusing on the Go': she learned to scan her body often to identify physical signs of

overwhelming experiences. Once she identified them she was taught to establish a right distance from the trigger(s) mentally and/or physically. Though, she does not yet know how to do a full Focusing process, she learned how to better manage her overwhelming feelings.

Rachael, an organizational advisor who knows Focusing, was waiting for her weekly meeting with a client who is the head of the Children's Program at the university. The client, Ronit, came into the room carrying a lot of anger and speaking in an unusually loud voice. Rachael listened and then said gently, *"I really hear how much anger and frustration is there for you, right now..."* and invited her to continue. Ronit spilled out a long explanation of what had happened in her previous meeting.

Rachel could see a positive change in Ronit's expression, just through the simple process of listening to her with an open heart. Then she said to Ronit, *"See if you can find a place to put that anger and frustration for just a little while ...and let me know when it feels right to start our meeting?"* Ronit became silent for awhile. Rachael waited quietly with her. Then, in a few minutes, Ronit took a long breath, smiled, and said, *"Thank you, I am ready now to start our meeting."*

A teenager came back from a trip of mountain climbing with his youth group. He looked excited and tired, but was silent, unable or unwilling to converse with his mother about it. His mother who is a skillful Focuser started the dialogue by describing how he looked to her. She said, "You look like a person who just finished a job he would never want to do again..." Her image of him as upset and angry jolted him, and he immediately stated, "You totally missed it, Mom. My experience was great; it felt like I won a gold medal in the Olympics!" to which his mother responded, "Wow, that does sound great!"

The mother, like all of our students, practiced what she was taught in our 'Focusing on the Go' unit. When Focusers-on-the-Go interact with someone at home or on the street who may have difficulty communicating feelings, they can first speak of an image found in their own body's felt sense, or alternatively, speak of an image they 'sense' in the silent person. Thus, Focusers-on-the-Go initiate conversations by first becoming aware of their own inner felt-senses to the situation and then casually sharing them. Often, those who were silent, respond from within — either accepting, modifying or rejecting the images, and/or come up with an original image.

Hopefully, in the above examples, we have demonstrated how Focusing language and one or several steps of the process, can be used and adapted in order to facilitate a direct connection with one's own bodily felt sense.

## **'FOCUSING ON THE GO' AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES**

The Focusing process is powerful and effective for experiencing felt shifts with negative feelings, as well as a powerful and effective tool for integrating positive experiences in our body memory.

General knowledge suggests that the body remembers and harbors negative feelings for many years, and at the same time often tends to screen out or not register positive experiences. For example, many people seem to reject or minimize compliments that are given

to them by their friends and/or have difficulty remembering good times in the face of bad events. We believe that people need to have *intention* and become *action oriented* in both outer and inner reality, in order to identify positive experiences and not let them pass by. Research on positive psychology suggests that when people open their hearts to constructive ideas, they will feel more fulfilled, more connected, and happier (Ben-Shahar, 2007). Therefore, we teach our Focusers to be on the watch for positive feelings and events, and do 'Focusing on the Go' as an initial step by first: identifying the positive event, second: giving it an image, and third: inviting the body to open up and breathe in the good/hopeful feeling. Later, one may choose to do a full Focusing process to explore the implicit meaning within the positive experience.

At the end of this positive-feeling Focusing process, the Focuser is again invited to take a seventh movement to further anchor a small action step in reality. In this way, an ongoing stream of positive experiences is present and circulated in one's body.

Examples: As Mary stood in the line to pay her groceries, the cashier gave her a huge, warm smile that she felt in her heart. Instead of hurrying past the moment or dismissing its impact, she remembered to pay attention and to stay with the good feeling, identifying it, giving it an image, and breathing it in to expand into her bodily felt sense. The warm feeling then spread throughout her whole body by the time she was out of the store. Mary was thankful for this fresh and high energy that helped her connect more deeply with others throughout the day.

David was known to always see the 'glass half empty'. In our Focusing class, he learned to scan his physical body and pay attention to the inner impact of positive events around him. He began to scan his body during a friend's hug to detect his body's subtle reactions. By learning to 'Pause' and keep a curious and interested attitude, he could then talk to himself as if he were his own best friend, "Give yourself a chance to experience something good! This is about the 'half *full* glass'. You can do it, David!..your life deserves to have positive experiences."

## **'FOCUSING ON THE GO' AND CLEARING A SPACE**

Eugene Gendlin refers to Clearing a Space as, "The first movement of Focusing which is enormously important: You can think of Clearing a Space as a brief time when you allow yourself to stop being a monument to your troubles" (p.81). This process involves establishing "friendly" inner relationships with yourself that includes safety, listening, and empathic presence with whatever issues or concerns might arise.

Initially, we teach our students Clearing a Space in the traditional way as a first movement in a Focusing session. We then also integrate it into our seventh movement of Action Step in Focusing, meaning that one can use Clearing a Space independent of the full Focusing process, repeat it as many times as one wishes, and apply it in different situations for different purposes.

Susan is a Focuser who met her friend Rebecca for dinner. Rebecca looked bothered and heavy. Susan took the napkin on the table and asked Rebecca, "May I ask you a ques-

tion?" (Rebecca nodded, *yes*.) "If this napkin represents for a moment...your inner space... do you have any sense of what is the one thing *in there* that is most bothersome to you?"

Rebecca looked down for a moment and then looked up and said, "It is my fight with my husband last night." Susan suggested to Rebecca that she might want to draw a square representing this fight on the napkin, adding, "Maybe check and see if there is something more... that is *there*?"

Rebecca was quiet for a moment and then said, "Yes, it is my unfinished project and my daughter's problems."

Again, she was invited to draw on the napkin. And again Susan suggested, "Maybe see if there is anything else...?" Rebecca looked down at the napkin and took a deep breath, "No, this is all... I feel relieved and lighter looking at this napkin by my side...I am hungry!"

We found that this short and active Clearing a Space really helps in shifting a person from a tight and stressful place to a more clear inner space. (This process can also be helpful with young children.)

## **CLEARING A SPACE WITHIN AN ELABORATED PROBLEM**

Dan was anxious and upset about the project he was unable to complete. His co-worker Ron, knew Focusing and offered to help Dan sort out his problem.

Ron drew a big circle on a piece of paper and divided it into eight parts. He then made a Focusing suggestion to Dan, "Perhaps sit for a moment with the whole problem...and gently ask yourself... What...for me...is the one issue that is most problematic in this project? How many parts of this circle represent the issue?" Dan was surprised to discover that the fear of failure consumed four parts of the circle. Then, Ron suggested, "Now maybe ask yourself...what is the next most important issue that is there?"

Dan sat quietly looking at the four remaining segments and said, "Two parts of the circle represent my pride and my competition with my colleague about finishing first. The other two parts represent my anxiety over possibly not receiving the prize for the winning team." Dan experienced a shift and sat in the chair more relaxed and thoughtful. He experienced a Focusing-on-the-Go version of Clearing a Space with a difficult project.

## **SUMMARY**

In this article we have presented a seventh movement, Action Step, and 'Focusing on the Go' — two innovations that represent the fruits of our past eight years of development and teaching the Focusing process in Israel. Our participants have been professionals and people from all walks of life, all of whom have been eager to increase their quality of daily living, especially under the political and security stressors of living in this country. These developments in Focusing join Gendlin's vision about spreading the language of Focusing as a language of the implicit in everyday life so that Focusing stands out as a new way of thinking and speaking.

Our participants report that they have experienced a new flow between their inner and outer realities. Not only they have experienced inner shifts within their Focusing process, but also were able to follow them with meaningful Action Step(s). One can think of a seventh movement: Action Step as igniting the car motor — on the inner journey — and then driving the car on the road. Thus, steps of Focusing and steps of outward action alternate and aid each other. In addition, ‘Focusing on the Go’ frees us to make beautiful mini trips in daily living on our longer life’s journey.

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