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## **Personality in professions - a story**

Lecture by Dr. Bernd Schmid

My lecture is crammed rather full. I wanted to offer you so much, maybe too much for one session. Consider it a buffet. Walk along it and see what is there. Pay no attention to what doesn't fit at the moment. Choose what corresponds to your appetite just now. You can have the rest packed up. If you want to you can acquire the cassette or video before you leave or download the text of my story from my homepage. So just listen and let your own inner images appear.

Allow me to tell you a story today rather than giving you a theoretical or keynote lecture. At first sight this situation does not really seem to provide the right atmosphere for storytelling and listening. But probably everyone of you has the necessary inner ear for it. I don't know whether we are more likely to see a bonfire flickering, hear the drumming of raindrops or feel a warm summer breeze in this place.

In times of intensive visualizations storytelling seems to be the appropriate form for the theme, namely personality.

*Personare = to ring through*

Even in organizations and throughout professional appearances, the overtones and undertones of a person's nature ring through. Professionalism is only partly the mastering of professional roles. Of course it is important to master the score for a concert, but even here it is the over- and undertones that make the music. Over- and

undertones determine what resounds in the listener, what force-fields arise. Without resonance and harmonizing, mutual force-fields do not emerge. In the long-term, without well-rounded force-fields the ability to be organized gets lost in systems such as personal life.

## **Firstly, an overview**

**In the first part** I am going to talk about roots and developments important for me and the way I deal with the subject. I will be referring to a few elements of my own life story and to some of the teachers whose work I am trying to carry on.

**In the second part** I will tell the story of businessman **A** whom I have coached. Using this example I hope to make it clear how a professional personality can be understood from the mental images standing behind it. Professional personality can be seen in the orchestration of a life story on the professional stage.

## **The first part**

*25 years ago I was working in the student counsellor office.*

Students consulted me when they felt stuck in their studies and were unable to make progress. The consulting procedures available at this time didn't really work. A lack of work-techniques or other malfunctions seemed not to account for what happened.

Rather, I had the impression that these students had lost an important feeling - had lost the "drive", that usually leads people to the next step, even through unknown or difficult terrain.

They lacked an answer to the question "Does my current path make any sense?".

I for my part felt compelled to start all over again with these student to pick up the lost or entangled threads!

I had just learned about guided imagery, and I tried to contact the students' original images concerning education and profession through imagery. I asked questions such as:

“What did you want to be when you were a child?”

Young men in particular tended to give me a relatively narrow range of similar answers and I was not sure whether this would lead us anywhere.

One very typical answer was "train driver".

However, more detailed questions revealed characteristic information about the person, e.g. "What scenes do you associate with this occupation?"

1. "Me and my engine - nobody knows it like I do!"
2. "Me and my stoker - two comrades travelling around the world!"
3. "So many people rely on me - I'll get them there safe and sound!"
4. I was particularly impressed by one of the answers: "The Orient Express. It goes to lots of foreign countries. Great uniform! I personally welcome all VIPs at the station." This student's studies seemed never-ending, but he was a passionate part-time worker. What was his job? Porter with an exquisite livery in a first class hotel!

## My own images<sup>1</sup>

Of course I also ask about my own images.

In me there is, for example, a **circus director**, (with my own appearances in the ring in mind, it could also be an artist, magician or clown): "In all events something to make people curious."

There is also a **ship's cook**: "A freighter, me in the galley, small, all very practical. I look after my crew. They sit here and talk. Then everyone goes back to his job."

A glance at **my present life and professional situation**:

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<sup>1</sup>Cited from the lecture „Dialogue between the generations“, held at the GWS-Congress on 23.02.2001 in Bensheim.

I don't travel with a retinue. In fact I'm a bit of a sourpuss as far as travelling goes. I don't have anything to do with shipping either, except for a depreciation fund.

But as trainer, consultant and seminar leader I have always particularly enjoyed making people marvel and, if possible, to grin as well.

Today I manage an Institute for Further Education for professional consultants and have 15 teacher trainers as well as half a dozen other employees. During seminars they live with us and I enjoy cooking for them, even if I don't do it quite so regularly any more. The institute's group room in the same building and under the same roof is similar to a circus cupola. Ever new groups look to us for inspiration and distance from everyday life, accompany us on a journey towards professional and personal development. We go far without me having to travel myself.

In the 25 years since the first beginnings with students, I have gone into many variations of psychotherapy and consultation on the one hand, and organization and personnel development on the other.

My interest in life stories and their meaningful accompaniment has always played a role.

And it is my desire – here and now – to help you to appreciate life stories and their contribution to understanding personal developments as well as some organizational developments.

## **Predecessors and teachers**

**Eric Berne**, the founder of transactional analysis, was drafted into the army as reviewing doctor during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

In order to use this time meaningfully, the psychiatrist began studying intuition. Within seconds he was able to guess the occupations of the men being called up with incredible accuracy.

Later Berne studied life stories and came to the conclusion that they followed a kind of life script. From the perspective of their time, he and his colleagues saw a fateful impediment to development in these life scripts. The course of development ought to be determined entirely independently by the individual person himself.

For this reason, they asked their clients if they should identify these life scripts so that the clients could free themselves from them.

In the fifties and sixties, Berne and others understood self-determination as freedom from formative influences.

Today we are more interested in freedom for: “Woe be to he who has no formative influences. How can he know what he is supposed to do and when his life is in tune?”

Transactional analysts such as **Fanita English** have already pointed out that a life script is a rough draft for a positively desired life story. Even when we encounter problematic life drafts, they are still an attempt to tell a life story in a meaningful way. Fanita English: existential behaviour patterns – analysis.

Hypnotherapist **Milton Erickson** assumed that problems arise when a creative life story becomes smothered in habitual realities. Consequently, his aim was to suspend habits and reactivate a person's original potential and creative energy.

My encounter with Erickson in 1979 deepened my understanding of unconscious processes and their influence by methods in which conscious-methodical and unconscious-intuitive elements interact, e.g. by working with metaphors and storytelling.

**Carl Gustav Jung's** psychology and the way he deals with dreams has occupied me for 30 years. Here it is a matter of individuation, a way of developing into the person inside oneself. On the way there we console ourselves and others despite all our imperfections with the statement: “Be patient! God is not finished with me yet.”

Jung's psychology is about the dialogue between conscious and unconscious processes.

The Jungian concept of **archetypes** and the images in which we encounter them has always fascinated me. This is how I see it: “The *world spirit* chooses from its infinite variables and fits you and I out. Thus qualified, you and I acting together make history unfold. The question is: 'What am I qualified for?’

What am I supposed to bring into this game?' "

We might call mental images as I describe them today *secondary archetypes*. Secondary because we are occupying ourselves with them in their culturally influenced form and refer them to certain contexts and current developments and necessities within these contexts, here and now in our professional lives.

Apart from by Carl Gustav Jung's works, I have also been influenced by work and encounters with Theodor Seifert, Marie Luise von Franz, James Hillman, Verena Kast and others.

I would particularly like to recommend James Hillman's book, "The soul's code: In search of character and calling". In this book he develops his concept of the demon that determines our lives. For my taste, though, some of this is too static and too fateful.

At this point I would also like to mention a few newer works which take up the theme in the U.S.A. and disseminate it throughout the world:

Dick Richards: "Setting your genius free". He describes the concept of genius in every one of us.

Richard Nelson Bowles: "What colour is your parachute?"

The titles give us a feeling for why there is a flourishing market here.

## **Some basic assumptions**

Now once more a few of the basic assumptions of my work. Maybe you don't share them. You don't have to. But if you adopt some of these assumptions for an hour on a trial basis, it is more likely to be possible to gain an advantage from my stories.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Basic assumption

In the background of many professional and entrepreneurial developments the life drafts of the people concerned, particularly those of the key figures, play a decisive role.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Basic assumption

These life drafts are influenced by

- the nature of these people
- talents and ambitions
- what the family has given them and the family's assignments
- the attitudes and lifestyles of the environment in which the person has grown up, and
- formative life experiences which
- are often condensed in key experiences

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Basic assumption

Life stories are based on rough drafts and the mental images influencing them. These drafts should neither be understood as static nor as fateful in the sense of inescapability. They are rather a person's attempt to give expression to the conscious-unconscious interaction between the parts of his personality in a life story.

## Life stories and coaching

What is a life story? A life story is what evolves from the attempt to orchestrate one's own life draft.

So this storytelling does not initially mean talking, but rather *designing a life* which is designed consciously and intentionally and influenced by unconscious, intuitive background controls.

If we want to understand this control in the background, we have to focus our attention on it.

Life situations are also examples of how further episodes are added to one's own life story in accordance with the life draft.

This applies not only to private life, where many people consider such

reflection to be obvious, but also to professional life. And to consultants too, of course.

Especially when life stories begin to falter or do not seem to be very successful, the people concerned often seek coaching or another form of consultation.

During consultation clients talk about their lives.

This storytelling does first of all mean *talking*.

The clients' style of talking often reflects how much they have lost contact with themselves and with what is essential in the concrete execution of their lives.

There are similar risks on the part of the consultant if he is blinded by specialist or methodical influences or by too little distance to an enterprise, an environment or ideology. It is important to find a way of speaking that is close to the personality in the sense described above.

But consultants often have to deal with a language quite distant from their own personality.

In order to understand the life drafts and mental images in spite of this, they need to discover their **intuition**, which can digest the resounding tones. The intuitive images resulting from this are not objective, but have to do with the consultants' own life drafts and mental images. And these in turn are digested by the clients – usually unconsciously – and influence interaction between client and consultant during consultation.

During joint consultation work, life stories encounter each other. And: the process of consultation itself is a further episode in which and through which life orchestrations are developed further. In principle this applies to all kinds of human encounter. Consultations, however, are a service that is paid for. So rightly certain quality standards apply. The consultant is paid for understanding how to shape the process in such a way that the clients' life stories can develop further in a meaningful way.



## **My setting for coaching**

One session lasts about 3 hours. Usually 2-3, sometimes more sessions take place at weekly intervals, but sometimes over a number of months.

One session basically consists of two halves.

First half: Observation of the current professional life and overall professional life development.

Occurrences in the organizational context and current problems are seen as independent themes, but even more as examples for the development theme at the moment.

Second half: Exploration of the mental landscape on the basis of current experiences in the professional world, but also in other areas, such as dreams. Particularly during the first two sessions I explore the client's life history and life draft in the light of the mental images in the background.

## **Mental images**

So we study:

- visionary images which clarify ideas on fulfilling and less fulfilling developments and
- images dealing with traditions, models and key experiences

In this way we learn of important blueprints that help us to understand what is and how it might continue.

These images have to be uncovered and their relationship to today's life orchestrations established.

Such images are frequently

- buried and have to be dredged up
- incomplete and have to be completed
- blocked by difficult experiences or taboos and have to be released

This work should help the client to make meaningful further developments in his life story and matching logical orchestrations in his professional life possible.

I always have a tape running that the client can take home with him at the end. The recording is almost always used, often as a reminder and for support in difficult situations. On occasion the tape is actually gone through in detail. In this way the often very dense and extensive process of consultation can be exploited optimally.