

Gaie Houston

## Alan Dale Interview

*Let's start by asking what you do.*

What I do? Well, I teach here. I run a network of people who are very broadly in the business of personal development or organisation development. Development means things like increasing your tolerance of uncertainty, increasing your willingness to act, lots of things of that kind which indicate that you are a more powerful person. Now that doesn't mean that others are less powerful but it does mean that your power relationships with them are different. So I'm very much concerned about the interaction between development, power and personal feelings, particularly within the context of an organisation. I'm involved in a few projects which are trying to deal with some of these issues, rather than do it only within an established organisation to try to set up new forms of organisation that would deal with some of the concerns.

*Can you talk about these concerns a little? What are the basic questions you are asking and trying to find answers to?*

Well, the project has to be 'Man', not some abstraction like 'the Organisation' or 'the Group', The question is always 'What shall we do for Man? What are Man's interests? What are Man's needs? How can we meet them? So that leads on to practical concerns like 'How shall Man get the benefit of organisations without paying a heavy price. Prices like being dependent on others, controlled by others, exploited by others. When I say dependent I don't just mean economically, but psychologically. As long as the world doesn't change, it's very stable, very benevolent; but as soon as any of these conditions change, you are in a desperately exposed position. So that, if you like, is a normative argument in favour of development. That's really the major concern. Some of the associated ones are to do with employment, because it seems to me that we often ask the wrong questions - instead of saying 'How can man get the benefit of organisations?' we say 'How can we get more participation or more group involvement or more confrontations?' When we ask a question in this way, it limits the number of choices which are open to us, so we don't think of some other solutions. But if we say 'How can we organise *For* Man?' then all sorts of possibilities pop up and I happen to believe that the major one that pops up at the moment in our society is the issue of employment. Who is to be master, or what is to be master. I'm just a little suspicious that most of the interest in participation comes from employers not employees. Whereas if you look around in society, the area for concern is the employment relationship, the master-servant relationship. It's often not very articulately expressed, it's more often in terms of voting with the feet - like every day one and a half million are absent from work, and nearly half a million kids are away from school. In a more articulate way, more and more people are seeking a professional body to protect them, but there's less willingness to be seen as an organisation man. There's more concern to be cosmopolitan in the sense of being able to move from one employer to another. There's less concern with Victorian ideas of loyalty and I think there's a genuine shift in values in society which seems to be supporting my recent research, that values are

shifting away from acquisitive towards more social and personal.

*What are you doing about this? What sort of groups do you want to see?*

I think to answer that I'd have to start with what groups we've got and compare that with what I'd like to see. I think what we've got in a large proportion of cases is a situation which is verging on the totalitarian at worst or a flight from hard reality at the best. There are some exceptions which are important but I believe that groups consciously formed for training purposes are just like other groups and organisations, there are good ones and there are bad ones.

*Can you talk to me more about, the ones that you see as valuable change agents?*

Well I suppose if a group is working well it can do things like validating a person, it can do things like helping a person increase his competence in interpersonal relations. It can help him to do things like coping with uncertainties, it can help him stand up against the group - I think that that is one of the most important social things that a group, a trained group, ought to do. It can make him develop his own values and judgements, which is obviously related to standing up against a group. It can help him deal with his affects, emotions, concerns about being included, which I think are important for many people. Many people don't even get involved in everyday life. It can help develop the identity of a person. It can encourage, I'm not sure about this one, in rare cases, real diversity among individuals. I've seen a few cases of that happening, . The bad things that happen are partly the opposite of those, for example as well as helping a person to develop a stronger identity it can also help a person take on the identity that a lot of the group send. You know the classic cases of Goffman's description of how he sent patients to the role of patient in a therapeutic group and denied them the role of parent or citizen or any other perfectly legitimate role and most of all he would deny them the status of a person. So there are all those negatives which are the opposite of the group thing, but I suppose I could sum up the group thing by saying the group can help a person become the origin of the game, the person who initiates the game. I think I'd imply that you have to be aware of what the game is and what the game structure of society is, what the roles are, what the values are, what the rules are, what the criteria of success are- success is perhaps too limiting a word, but some criteria for what you value. What the rituals are and so on. Once you become aware of the game structure then I think you are much freer of the dominance of the group and less likely to relate to it in a conforming way. In a bad group you end up as the pawn in someone else's game, often the trainer's game, but it is also quite often the game of the people who know the group game. You know that sort of thing.

You see it very typically in a group where some people have been in a group before and some haven't and it seems to be the case too often that the experienced ones are just sending roles to the inexperienced ones, telling them how to behave in all sorts of subtle and not so subtle ways and if you don't know your prescribed advances or your prescribed love or your prescribed anger ration, then there's something wrong with you. You are not conforming to the model of things and the right sort of behaviour and the right sort of person. So in a way that is very repressive.

*Yes there is a difficulty with that that occurs to me, that the philosophy I've got when I'm working as a facilitator in groups is that the hopeful outcome for any person is independence from the group, by which I think I mean many of the things you have said. But it seems that starting where we do start, in this society, we have to work through quite a lot of dependence and maybe emotional bonds to reach this point. I'm just frightened that in what you are saying you are suggesting that it is not valid to go through the evolution of the group process.*

Well I'm going to react to that in two or three ways. First of all, I do believe that it is appropriate and helpful for many people to have what you call an emotional bath or to have many other things which I was running down a few minutes ago. But I don't believe it is right for everybody and I'm worried when you insist that everybody goes through this process. And another thing I'm worried about is the assumption that every group, every time it meets has to go through the same process, which seems to me absurd. And so you have the worst kind of ritual where people are looking round saying 'This is the control phase, this is the inclusion phase' or this kind of stuff which is pure ritual, and again it is a very political way of looking at the world because as soon as you start using the labels and definitions you are creating a number of self-fulfilling prophecies about the social world. If we know anything from the sociology of knowledge, which I think is a theory that has a hell of a lot to say about human behaviour in groups, the thing we know is that our knowledge of the social world is constructed by us. If we change the labels we use, that's one of the most dramatic things we can do.

*Yes, sure. And alongside that you would wish people to achieve a very high degree of awareness of group processes with the groups where they are, and really outside that group?*

That's right. The context is so often ignored within the group. We all bring to it authority relationships from outside; we all bring into the group values from society as a whole and things like that. A group's boundaries are not closed and we behave as though they were. There are so many interactions going on, many of them below the surface and we don't seem aware of them. My concern is that we are trying to develop the ability to see what's going on at the meta, the level above the group, I think that's what people like Goffman and literary people like Arthur Koestler are very helpful in doing, because they do expose the rules of the game in a much broader sense. There is a very nice paper by Timothy Leary about change in behaviour in which he argues that making the game structure clear is the most dramatic way to change behaviour. Once you know what the game is you are no longer trapped in it, you can choose the game and that seems to me very important.

*Finally could we go back to your work in organisational development and how this impacts on the political scene?*

I think we are in a process in western society now of working through the Industrial Revolution which destroyed a long social happening which had some basis of security for everybody. Even in those feudal villages there was some base of security in terms of social support at least and sometimes there was some security in terms of at least

being able to eat. I think Industrial Revolutions destroy both these kinds of security. Along with that you have technology that is fragmenting man's world, work is split into tiny little bits and goals are very closely prescribed, control is very centralised, and that went on and is still going on to a large extent. I think as we move from mass production technology to process technology or concern develops in some cases for a return of craft technology, then the atomisation begins to stop and we begin to put things together again. So at the moment there are a lot of things going on which make it possible to reconstruct a different relationship between man and his world and other men. Almost in some cases a return to the Guild system among craftsmen, and I do know a couple of cases where that is happening. For example there is a firm where a group of 80 or so building workers have organised themselves as a workers' co-operative, and everyone does some skilled and some unskilled work and the payment differentials are very compressed - I think the ratio is 2:1, which are the top and bottom persons in the organisation. I suppose the other thing that is happening now in all Western societies is that the platform of security is being put back in a sense, in that we have got some economic gains, we have got some social welfare legislation - I know it is limited but we have got some. So people are a bit freer to experiment and they are experimenting. The kinds of experiment I'm involved in are to do with helping people who want to seize control of their own lives.

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Constance Tottle

## Acupuncture today

We can find a complete record of Chinese Acupuncture in the 'Nei Ching' (2697 B.C.) Because of its seemingly unscientific nature, European physicians have always been rather reluctant to use this method. Although, the French doctor Berlioz, father of the Composer, used acupuncture to help his patients.

Only a few years ago, Einstein told the World that energy and matter are the same thing; but we must not forget that the Chinese knew this long ago, ever since Chung Sei wrote 800 years ago. And 5000 years ago, it was written in an old Chinese book 'It is quite impossible to define energy without observing physical modifications.'

According to Chinese philosophy all existence is a manifestation of the interplay of two forces, Yang and Yin. Seven of the body's meridians - or energy parts - are positive ('Yang') and seven negative ('Yin').

Another medical man, a Greek by nationality, Aesculapius, had put about 2000 years ago this important axiom into two words, *everything moves*. This was the starting point for a group of Korean scientists who did a great deal of research into acupuncture by isolating and photographing small areas in and below the skin in the deeper tissues of the body.