

- How else can you get your revenge?
- What would be the worst thing you could do?
- Has this person suffered enough?
- What more could you do?
- How does it feel to be revenged?
- Are you satisfied yet?

By raising our awareness of the feelings

of hate that lie behind revenge, there may be a window through to our hurt. Perhaps, in a relationship of trust, it might just be safe enough to start to feel the pain. Only then might it be possible to transform hate into hurt and revenge into reparation.

Tell me, how do *you* take revenge?

Further Reading

Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Penguin, 1975

Robert A. Hall, 'A Schema of the Gestalt (Concept of the Organismic Flow and its Disturbance' in *The Growing Edge of Gestalt Therapy*, Edward W.L. Smith (ed), Citadel Press, 1976

Harry Guntrip, *Schizoid Phenomena. Object Relations and the Self*, Hogarth Press, 1968

Revenge and the Group Facilitator

Bennet Fuchs

Being a group facilitator can be a tricky business. There is much to be aware of and many difficult situations can arise. One aspect of facilitation which I have not read about in the many books on the subject, nor was taught about in my early training, is the unconscious revenge of the facilitator. I use the term unconscious revenge because I believe that most of us do not act on feelings of revenge once we are conscious that they exist. There is much talk about the use and abuse of power by therapists, and unconsciously taking re-

venge in a group is one aspect of this that I have become aware of through personal experience.

One of the difficult aspects of group work is that a leader or facilitator can more or less expect to be the subject of projections and of attacks. In fact, I now believe it is part of the job and indeed a healthy development in the evolution of a group, when participants feel safe enough to attack the leader, possibly bringing out their own leadership potential in the process. Of course, being human and having

Bennett Fuchs is a psychotherapist and group facilitator living and practising in the Findhorn Community in Scotland.

feelings, we group leaders don't usually enjoy such experiences. I used to think being attacked was a disaster in a group. 'I must not be a very good leader if I'm attacked; this person is obviously working out their authority stuff on me (how dare they); I must show the group how competent I am in handling the situation, showing up my attacker as projecting' and so on. I have since learned to have a more welcoming attitude towards these situations. Part of that learning for me was to recognise and process the feelings from an attack so that I would not be taking revenge unconsciously in my responses to it.

I remember the week that I discovered the extent to which I took revenge. I was visiting a foreign city to give a talk about my community and a weekend workshop. During the talk, two middle-aged women arrived half an hour late and sat at the back. After a few minutes one of them jumped in and said 'I was expecting you to be much older, you don't look like you're old enough to know anything, what makes you think you can come in here and tell us anything about spirituality or community?' The tone of voice was derisive and challenging. There was an audible gasp followed by silence in the polite audience. I was quite surprised and momentarily shocked. After all, I was expecting to give a little public presentation, and answer a few questions, and had not been prepared for this.

As a reply, I told the group quite calmly that I had no interest in preaching to them about spirituality but was willing to talk about my own life and to listen to others share about theirs. Using humour and charm, I shared that I had a near death

experience in the late '70s and this motivated me to begin looking deeper into some of the spiritual questions in my own life. The tension in the room relaxed. I had established my authority without engaging with my attacker and had won the group over to my side. Afterwards I felt good with how I had handled the situation. My host reported some gossip overheard at the end of the meeting which was something like 'that woman was really terrible to that nice young man'. I felt good hearing this; it confirmed my sense of having 'won'.

Before the workshop began, my host informed me that the woman from the talk was coming and that another person who was at the talk dropped out when she discovered that this woman would attend. My host, who was co-leading the group, said not to worry: she knew the woman and could handle her. During the second day of a two-day workshop this woman got into a conflict with another participant. My co-leader and I worked with them, unfolding the conflict, up to a point. The other participant discovered his part in the drama and could apply the insight to the situation. However, the woman who had attacked me days earlier got more agitated. She accused the group, and its leaders, of being against her and stormed out. At the break, my co-leader spoke to her (she was hanging around outside). She then returned to the group and sat quietly the rest of the day.

After the workshop was over, my co-leader and I sat down to download the weekend and do some peer supervision. It was then that I realised that I had been somewhat withholding of my compassion with this woman. In a way, she was right

to feel that I was against her — unconsciously I was. Nobody seeing the situation from the outside would have noticed (even my co-leader) that I was holding back, not giving her my best as a therapist. As I unfolded my process in supervision, I recognised that I was still feeling hurt and angry about how she treated me at the talk several days earlier. Since I had 'won' at the time (another form of revenge) I hadn't dealt with my own feelings about it. I had only identified with the role of the professional who could handle it, not with the part of me that was hurt. So I unconsciously took revenge on her while appearing to behave in a totally professional manner.

I have since become more awake to the need to process my feelings about group participants whom I find difficult. For example, in another workshop there was an older man whom I knew would be challenging within the group. He spoke in the third person, beginning most statements with 'obviously', or 'everyone knows that'. As the group progressed, he became increasingly attacking, accusing me of touting my 'unscientific dogma' and responding to other group members by telling them how they had it wrong, what their problem really was and why they shouldn't feel the way they do. The group became increasingly hostile towards him.

I sat back at first, allowing the conflict to escalate, while quickly working on myself. I acknowledged to myself the anger I was feeling towards him and the desire to

take revenge by letting the group attack him and perhaps helping them do it more effectively. As soon as I acknowledged these feelings, I could also see the desperation behind the behaviour, appreciate how much it took for him to be in a group like this, and begin to feel compassion for this man. I interrupted the increasingly polarised debate and asked him if he enjoyed the role he had in the group. He replied that it was his role in life and, with a little help, unfolded the passion for truth and critical thinking behind the role. I acknowledged how important I consider that role to be in society (he was in his 60s and this was in Germany) and invited him to question and criticise any theory or information I gave.

In the end the process served him. Having his role validated, he could relax and was far less combative. He learned the difference between critical thought and trampling on people's feelings. It also served the group because he was a catalyst for other group members to work on 'negative father' issues, stand up for themselves without attacking, while learning to see him as a person who was also struggling to be seen.

With the perspective of hindsight, I can see how working on my own feelings of revenge enables me to be far more effective as a group leader, as is demonstrated in the two examples above. I think that acknowledging and letting go of our very human patterns of vengeance is essential for a group facilitator